

# *oppaga*

## *Sharpening the Pencil*

### Best Financial Management Practices Review



*Gadsden  
County  
School  
District*



Office of Program Policy Analysis  
and Government Accountability

*an office of the Florida Legislature*

Report No. 03-49



# The Florida Legislature

## OFFICE OF PROGRAM POLICY ANALYSIS AND GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY



Gary R. VanLandingham, Interim Director

September 2003

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

I have directed that a Best Financial Management Practices Review be conducted of the Gadsden County School District. The 2001 Legislature directed that the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) conduct 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, Gadsden County School District* to comply with the law directing OPPAGA to issue a report to the district regarding its use of the best practices and cost savings recommendations.

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

Debbie Gilreath was the project manager for this review, which was supervised by David Summers. Other OPPAGA staff included Julie Golding, Rashada Houston, Bill Howard, Nate Lassila, Susan Munley, Lyndon Rodgers, Becky Vickers and Don Wolf. Auditor General staff included Greg Centers and Jim Kiedinger under the supervision of David Martin.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary R. VanLandingham".

Gary R. VanLandingham  
Interim Director

GRV/mc

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

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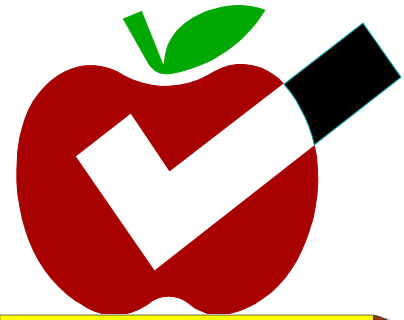
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# Digest of the Best Financial Management Practices Review

Gadsden County School District



Sharpening the Pencil

Report No. 03-49A

September 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) and the Auditor General conducted a Best Financial Management Practices Review of the Gadsden County School District during Fiscal Year 2002-03. The review determined that the Gadsden County School District currently is using 71% (105 of 147) of the applicable best practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education.<sup>1</sup> The district is using a majority of the best practices in 8 of the 10 areas reviewed. (See Exhibit 1.) The report contains action plans to address the remaining best practices and to make the district eligible for the Seal of Best Financial Management. A detailed listing of all the best practices that identifies the district's status in relation to each starts on page 6 of this report.

<sup>1</sup> One best practice does not apply to the district given its size and certain aspects of its operations.

## Exhibit 1

### The District Is Using 71% of the Applicable Best Practices

Best Practice Area (Total Practices)	Is the District Using Individual Best Practices?		
	Yes	No	N/A
<a href="#">Management Structures</a> (14)	12	2	0
<a href="#">Performance Accountability System</a> (3)	0	3	0
<a href="#">Educational Service Delivery</a> (12)	4	8	0
<a href="#">Administrative and Instructional Technology</a> (9)	6	3	0
<a href="#">Personnel Systems and Benefits</a> (11)	10	1	0
<a href="#">Facilities Construction</a> (24)	20	3	1
<a href="#">Facilities Maintenance</a> (22)	15	7	0
<a href="#">Transportation</a> (20)	19	1	0
<a href="#">Food Service Operations</a> (11)	6	5	0
<a href="#">Cost Control Systems</a> (22)	13	9	0
<b>All Areas (148)</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>1</b>

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 \$709,000 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.

**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
<b><u>Facilities Maintenance</u></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a written energy management plan with incentives for schools to reduce energy consumption. (Best Practice 15, Page 8-17)</li> </ul>	\$300,000
<b><u>Transportation</u></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collect reimbursement for qualified Medicaid trips. (Best Practice 14, Page 9-14)</li> </ul>	54,000
<b><u>Food Service Operations</u></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand use of USDA Donated Food processors. (Best Practice 6, Page 10-11)</li> </ul>	70,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase availability of a la carte items. (Best Practice 6, Page 10-11)</li> </ul>	60,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Convert to “Offer Versus Serve” method on serving lines. (Best Practice 6, Page 10-11)</li> </ul>	225,000
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$709,000</b>

***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.<sup>2</sup> Florida law directs the OPPAGA and 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***

Two of the most important provisions of the Sharpening the Pencil 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 the schedule of Best Financial Management Practice Reviews in Florida law, the Legislature directed that OPPAGA review the Gadsden County School District during Fiscal Year 2002-03. With 7,195 students in the 2002-03 school year, the district is the 25th smallest of the state’s 67 school districts. The district has 17 schools: 8 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, 4 high schools or combination middle and high schools, 1 charter school, 1 adult center, and 1 alternative education school that provides programs at three different locations.

OPPAGA and Auditor General staff conducted fieldwork and developed report findings and recommendations. The report contains findings related to each best practice and detailed action plans to address best practice standards not met. 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 action plan 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.

<sup>2</sup> A list of cost saving opportunities identified in prior best practices reviews is available under [Ways to Save](#) on OPPAGA’s website, the *Florida Monitor*, at <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us>.

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

## ***General Overview and District Obligations***

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Currently, the Gadsden County School District is using 71% of the best practices adopted by the Commissioner and at this time is not eligible for a Seal of Best Financial Management. Appendix C of the full report contains an action plan detailing how the district could meet the best practices within two years.

As provided by law, 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 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 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 these 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***

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

### **Management Structures**

The Gadsden County School District is using 12 of 14 of the best practices in management structures. The school board and superintendent have policies and procedures in place to ensure the district is effectively run and oversee its financial resources. The district has reviewed its administrative staffing levels, given principals sufficient authority to manage their schools, considered options to increase revenues, involved the community in decision making, and developed a system to accurately project enrollment. To use the remaining best practice standards, the district should prioritize the goals and objectives in its strategic plan, ensure that all strategic plan objectives are measurable, and annually review progress towards achieving strategic plan goals and objectives. The district also should develop links between the strategic plan and its budgeting process.

### **Performance Accountability System**

The Gadsden County School District is not using the three performance accountability best practices. To begin using these three best practices, the district should ensure that its performance accountability system is more effective by developing more specific goals and measurable objectives for its non-instructional program areas and establish program-level goals and performance objectives for specific educational programs. The district also should formally evaluate its performance against objectives and act on the results of those evaluations. Finally, the district should start reporting more performance information to the general public, such as through improvements to the district's Internet web page or an annual report printed in a local newspaper.

### **Educational Service Delivery**

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of 4 of the 12 educational service delivery best practices, but still could enhance operations in those areas. For the last two years, the district has been implementing strategies to improve low performing schools, and is putting systems in place to improve district oversight of schools. However, to meet standards for the remaining 8 best practices and ensure the performance,

efficiency, and effectiveness of its educational programs, the district should

- use non-academic as well as academic data to identify needs, evaluate programs, and plan for student improvement;
- expand support for Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs, and develop systems for tracking processes and outcomes of the program;
- improve programs for at-risk students, including taking steps to ensure compliance with state regulations for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs, and providing adequate alternative education and in-school suspension programs;
- increase the effectiveness of the school improvement planning process;
- plan for the effective progression of students between grade levels;
- re-examine the organizational structure of education departments in the district office;
- integrate technology into the K-12 curriculum; and
- develop a plan for improving the delivery of student support services.

### **Administrative and Instructional Technology**

The Gadsden County School District is using six of the nine administrative and instructional technology best practices. The district acquires technology in a cost-effective manner and provides professional development training. The district also has written policies that apply safe and appropriate use of technology and provides timely technical support. The district also follows generally accepted data processing practices and meets the information needs of administrative and instructional personnel. To use the remaining best practices, the district should improve and expand its technology plan, provide a more dependable infrastructure that maximizes network and Internet access and performance, and use technology to improve communication.

### **Personnel Systems and Benefits**

The Gadsden County School District is using 10 of the 11 personnel systems and benefits best practices. The district is generally managing its human resource activities such as recruiting and hiring, training, and appraising employee performance in an economical and efficient manner. To use the remaining best practice, the district should improve its methods to identify and address issues related to employee turnover.

### **Facilities Construction**

The Gadsden County School District is using 20 of the 23 applicable facilities construction best practices.<sup>3</sup> The district is effectively using long-range planning and state money for new construction to manage declining enrollment and funding, and to help solve its urgent facilities maintenance problems. To use the remaining best practices, the district should improve its planning processes by setting budgetary plans and priorities in its five-year facilities work plan, and establish mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its construction projects.

### **Facilities Maintenance**

The Gadsden County School District is using 15 of the 22 best practices relating to facilities maintenance. The district has established goals, objectives, job descriptions, and an annual budget with spending limits for the maintenance department. The district has established a long-range facilities plan that will cost-effectively address the district's declining student enrollment and limited maintenance funding. Although district schools have numerous condition problems, some schools may not warrant the commitment of resources to perform repairs because they are scheduled for closure. To use the remaining best practices, the district should establish better accountability mechanisms for maintenance and custodial work, more proactively prioritize and address serious maintenance problems and incorporate plans for addressing these problems in its planning and budgeting documents, provide a standard training program for maintenance and custodial workers, and establish a written energy management plan.

### **Transportation**

The Gadsden County School District is using 19 of the 20 transportation best practices. The district ensures that transportation staff can respond promptly and appropriately to vehicle accidents and breakdowns and that district vehicles are acquired economically and will be available to meet its current and future transportation needs. However, to meet the remaining best practice standard, the district should develop an accountability system for transportation operations and report performance to the school board on an annual basis.

### **Food Service Operations**

The Gadsden County School District is using 6 of the 11 food service operations best practices. The district is doing well in the areas of organizational relationships, training, operational procedures, self-inspection system, compliance with state, federal, and district policies, and

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<sup>3</sup> The construction best practice relating to compliance with the Florida Building Code did not apply to the district during our fieldwork.



interaction with customers. To meet the remaining best practice standards and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its food service program, the district needs to improve its planning and budgeting process, take a more proactive role in management of assets of the program, develop an improved performance measurement system, and use the performance management system to report on program performance and as a basis for managing the program.

### **Cost Control Systems**

The Gadsden County School District is using 13 of the 22 Cost Control Systems Best Practices. To meet the remaining best practice standards and enhance the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its cost control systems, the district should establish written procedures that promote ethical financial management practices and provide for confidential reporting of suspected improprieties, develop procedures to timely resolve findings noted in external audits and other monitoring reviews, develop a strategic plan that includes measurable financial goals and link the plan objectives to its annual budget, conduct annual risk assessments, strengthen internal controls over tangible personal property, and document the cost effectiveness of its current warehouse function in relation to alternative inventory services such as direct purchases using a purchasing card program or outsourcing the warehouse function.

## ***Gadsden County School District Best Financial Management Practices***

***Currently, the Gadsden County School District is using 71% (105 of 147) of the applicable best practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education and at this time is not eligible for a Seal of Best Financial Management. The detailed list below contains all the best practices and identifies the district's current status in relation to each.***

<b><i>Best Practices</i></b>	<b><i>Is the District Using Best Practices?</i></b>		
<b><u>MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES</u></b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
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.	✓		2-7
2. The board and superintendent have procedures to ensure that board meetings are efficient and effective.	✓		2-8
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.	✓		2-9
6. The district periodically reviews its administrative staffing and makes changes to eliminate unnecessary positions and improve operating efficiency.	✓		2-10
7. The superintendent and school board exercise effective oversight of the district's financial resources.	✓		2-10
8. The district has clearly assigned school principals the authority they need to effectively manage their schools while adhering to district-wide policies and procedures.	✓		2-10
9. The district has a multi-year strategic plan with annual goals and measurable objectives based on identified needs, projected enrollment, and revenues.		✓	2-11
10. The district has a system to accurately project enrollment.	✓		2-13
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.		✓	2-13
12. When necessary, the district considers options to increase revenue.	✓		2-14
13. The district actively involves parents and guardians in the district's decision making and activities.	✓		2-14
14. The district actively involves business partners and community organizations in the district's decision making and activities.	✓		2-15

**Best Practices**

**Is the District Using Best Practices?**

<b><u>PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM</u></b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
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"> <li>Vocational/Technical Education, English for Speakers of Other Languages Education, Facilities Construction, Facilities Maintenance, Transportation, Food Services, and Safety and Security.<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>		✓	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.		✓	3-4

<b><u>EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY</u></b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
1. District administrators use both academic and nonacademic data to improve K-12 education programs.		✓	4-6
2. The district provides effective and efficient Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs for students with disabilities and students who are gifted. <sup>5</sup>		✓	4-8
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]. <sup>6</sup>		✓	4-10
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).	✓		4-14
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.		✓	4-15
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		✓	4-16
8. The district's organizational structure and staffing of educational programs minimizes administrative layers and processes.		✓	4-17
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.	✓		4-18
10. The district has sufficient school library or media centers to support instruction.	✓		4-19

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Programs for students with disabilities are required by federal law to serve children aged 3 through 21.

<sup>6</sup> 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?**

<b><u>EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY</u></b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
11. The district utilizes instructional technology in the classroom to enhance curriculum and improve student achievement.		✓	4-19
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.		✓	4-20

<b><u>ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY</u></b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
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. <sup>7</sup>	✓		5-6
3. District and school-based staff receive professional development training for all technologies used in the district.	✓		5-7
4. The district provides timely and cost-effective technical support that enables educators and district staff to successfully implement technology in the workplace.	✓		5-8
5. The district maintains a dependable, standards-based infrastructure employing strategies that cost-effectively maximize network and Internet access and performance.		✓	5-9
6. The district uses technology to improve communication.		✓	5-10
7. The district has written policies that apply safe, ethical, and appropriate use practices that comply with legal and professional standards.	✓		5-11
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.	✓		5-12
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.	✓		5-13

<b><u>PERSONNEL SYSTEMS AND BENEFITS</u></b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
1. The district efficiently and effectively recruits and hires qualified instructional and non-instructional personnel.	✓		6-5
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. <sup>8</sup>		✓	6-6

<sup>7</sup> Instructional needs include incorporating technology into the curriculum and needs of students learning how to use technology.

<sup>8</sup> 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?**

<b><u>PERSONNEL SYSTEMS AND BENEFITS</u></b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
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. <sup>9</sup>	✓		6-7
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.	✓		6-8
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. <sup>10</sup>	✓		6-9
6. The district has efficient and cost-effective system for managing absenteeism and the use of substitute teachers and other substitute personnel.	✓		6-9
7. The district maintains personnel records in an efficient and readily accessible manner.	✓		6-10
8. The district uses cost-containment practices for its Workers' Compensation Program.	✓		6-10
9. The district uses cost-containment practices for its employee benefits programs, including health insurance, dental insurance, life insurance, disability insurance, and retirement.	✓		6-10
10. The district's human resource program is managed effectively and efficiently.	✓		6-10
11. For classes of employees that are unionized, the district maintains an effective collective bargaining process.	✓		6-11

<b><u>FACILITIES CONSTRUCTION</u></b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
1. The district has effective long-range planning processes. <sup>11</sup>	✓		7-10
2. When developing the annual five-year facilities work plan the district evaluates alternatives to minimize the need for new construction.	✓		7-11
3. The five-year facilities work plan establishes budgetary plans and priorities.		✓	7-11

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> Long-range covers 5-20 years out.

**Best Practices**

**Is the District Using Best Practices?**

<b><u>FACILITIES CONSTRUCTION</u></b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
4. The school board ensures responsiveness to the community through open communication about the construction program and the five-year facilities work plan.	✓		7-12
5. The district has an effective site selection process based on expected growth patterns.	✓		7-12
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.	✓		7-13
7. Funds collected for school projects were raised appropriately.	✓		7-13
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.	✓		7-14
9. The district develops thorough descriptions and educational specifications for each construction project. <sup>12</sup>	✓		7-14
10. The architectural design fulfills the building specification needs as determined by the district.	✓		7-15
11. New construction, remodeling, and renovations incorporate effective safety features.	✓		7-15
12. The district minimizes construction and maintenance and operations costs through the use of cost-effective designs, prototype school designs, and frugal construction practices.	✓		7-15
13. The district has effective management processes for construction projects.	✓		7-16
14. District planning provides realistic time frames for implementation that are coordinated with the opening of schools.	✓		7-16
15. All projects started after March 1, 2002, comply with the Florida Building Code.	N/A		7-16
16. The district requires appropriate inspection of all school construction projects.	✓		7-16
17. The district retains appropriate professionals to assist in facility planning, design, and construction.	✓		7-17
18. The district follows generally accepted and legal contracting practices to control costs.	✓		7-17
19. The district minimizes changes to facilities plans after final working drawings are initiated in order to control project costs.	✓		7-18
20. The architect recommends payment based on the percentage of work completed. A percentage of the contract is withheld pending completion of the project.	✓		7-18
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.	✓		7-18

<sup>12</sup> 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?**

<b><u>FACILITIES CONSTRUCTION</u></b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
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.	✓		7-19
23. The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the construction program.		✓	7-20
24. The district regularly evaluates facilities construction operations based on established benchmarks and implements improvements to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.		✓	7-21

<b><u>FACILITIES MAINTENANCE</u></b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
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.		✓	8-6
3. The district obtains and uses customer feedback to identify and implement program improvements.		✓	8-8
4. The district has established procedures and staff performance standards to ensure efficient operations.	✓		8-9
5. The department maintains educational and district support facilities in a condition that enhances student learning and facilitates employee productivity.		✓	8-10
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.	✓		8-12
7. Complete job descriptions and appropriate hiring and retention practices ensure that the maintenance and operations department has qualified staff.	✓		8-13
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.		✓	8-13
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.	✓		8-14
10. The district accurately projects cost estimates of major maintenance projects.	✓		8-15
11. The board maintains a maintenance reserve fund to handle one-time expenditures necessary to support maintenance and operations.		✓	8-15
12. The district minimizes equipment costs through purchasing practices.	✓		8-15
13. The district provides maintenance and operations department staff the tools and equipment required to accomplish their assigned tasks.	✓		8-16
14. The district uses proactive maintenance practices to reduce maintenance costs.	✓		8-16
15. The maintenance and operations department identifies and implements strategies to contain energy costs.		✓	8-17
16. The district has an energy management system in place, and the system is maintained at original specifications for maximum effectiveness.	✓		8-19

**Best Practices**

**Is the District Using Best Practices?**

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

<b><u>TRANSPORTATION</u></b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
1. The district coordinates long-term planning and budgeting for student transportation within the context of district and community planning.	✓		9-6
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.	✓		9-6
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. <sup>13</sup>	✓		9-6
4. The organizational structure and staffing levels of the district’s transportation program minimizes administrative layers and processes.	✓		9-8
5. The district maintains an effective staffing level in the vehicle maintenance area and provides support for vehicle maintenance staff to develop its skills.	✓		9-8
6. The district effectively and efficiently recruits and retains the bus drivers and attendants it needs.	✓		9-8
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.	✓		9-9
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.	✓		9-10
9. The district provides timely routine servicing for buses and other district vehicles, as well as prompt response for breakdowns and other unforeseen contingencies.	✓		9-11
10. The district ensures that fuel purchases are cost-effective and that school buses and other vehicles are efficiently supplied with fuel.	✓		9-11
11. The district maintains facilities that are conveniently situated to provide sufficient and secure support for vehicle maintenance and other transportation functions.	✓		9-12
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.	✓		9-12

<sup>13</sup> 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?**

<b><u>TRANSPORTATION</u></b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
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.	✓		9-13
14. The district provides efficient transportation services for exceptional students in a coordinated fashion that minimizes hardships to students.	✓		9-14
15. The district ensures that staff acts promptly and appropriately in response to any accidents or breakdowns	✓		9-15
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.	✓		9-15
17. The district provides appropriate technological and computer support for transportation functions and operations.	✓		9-16
18. The district monitors the fiscal condition of transportation functions by regularly analyzing expenditures and reviewing them against the budget.	✓		9-17
19. The district has reviewed the prospect for privatizing transportation functions, as a whole or in part.	✓		9-17
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.		✓	9-18

<b><u>FOOD SERVICE OPERATIONS</u></b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
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.	✓		10-8
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.		✓	10-14
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.	✓		10-15
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.		✓	10-16
10. The food service program and district complies with federal state and district policy.	✓		10-16

**Best Practices**

**Is the District Using Best Practices?**

<b><u>FOOD SERVICE OPERATIONS</u></b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
11. The district conducts activities to ensure that customer needs are met and acts to improve services and food quality where needed.	✓		10-17

<b><u>COST CONTROL SYSTEMS</u></b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
1. The district periodically analyzes the structure and staffing of its financial services organization.	✓		11-7
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.	✓		11-9
4. District financial staff analyzes significant expenditure processes to ensure they are appropriately controlled.	✓		11-10
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.		✓	11-11
7. The district produces an annual budget that is tied to the strategic plan and provides useful and understandable information to users.		✓	11-11
8. Management analyzes strategic plans for measurable objectives or measurable results.		✓	11-12
9. The district ensures that it receives an annual external audit and uses the audit to improve its operations.		✓	11-13
10. The district has an effective internal audit function and uses the audits to improve its operations. <sup>14</sup>		✓	11-13
11. The district ensures that audits of internal funds and discretely presented component units (foundations and charter schools) are performed timely.	✓		11-14
12. The district periodically reviews cash management activities, banking relationships, investment performance, and considers alternatives.	✓		11-15
13. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective management of capital assets.		✓	11-16
14. The district ensures significant capital outlay purchases meet strategic plan objectives.	✓		11-17
15. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective debt management.	✓		11-17
16. The district ensures that significant debt financings meet strategic plan objectives.	✓		11-17
17. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective risk management	✓		11-18
18. District staff periodically monitors the district's compliance with various laws and regulations related to risk management.	✓		11-18
19. The district prepares appropriate written cost and benefit analyses for insurance coverage.	✓		11-18

<sup>14</sup> 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><b>COST CONTROL SYSTEMS</b></u>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
20. The district has established written policies and procedures to take maximum advantage of competitive bidding, volume discounts, and special pricing agreements.		✓	11-19
21. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective management of inventories.	✓		11-21
22. The district periodically evaluates the warehousing function to determine its cost-effectiveness.		✓	11-21



## *The Florida Legislature*

# *Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability*

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

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[Performance-based program budgeting \(PB<sup>2</sup>\) reports and information](#) offer a variety of tools. Program evaluation and justification reviews assess state programs operating under performance-based program budgeting. Also offered are performance measures information and our assessments of measures.

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

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

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# 1 Introduction

## Overview

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The 2001 Florida Legislature created the Sharpening the Pencil Program to improve school district management and use of resources and identify cost savings. Florida law 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. As illustrated in Exhibit 1-1, the practices address district performance in 10 broad areas.

### Exhibit 1-1 Best Financial Management Practices Review Areas

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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

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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.

## ***Methodology***

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OPPAGA and the Auditor General 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 Gadsden County School District office and public schools. The evaluators interviewed district administrators and personnel, held a public forum, conducted a focus group with principals, 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 Gadsden's programs and activities in context with other Florida school districts, OPPAGA and the Auditor General gathered information from five peer districts around the state: Columbia, Dixie, Jackson, Jefferson, and Madison. The peer districts were selected based on their similarities across a number of categories, including the size of the student population and demographic information.

## ***County Profile***

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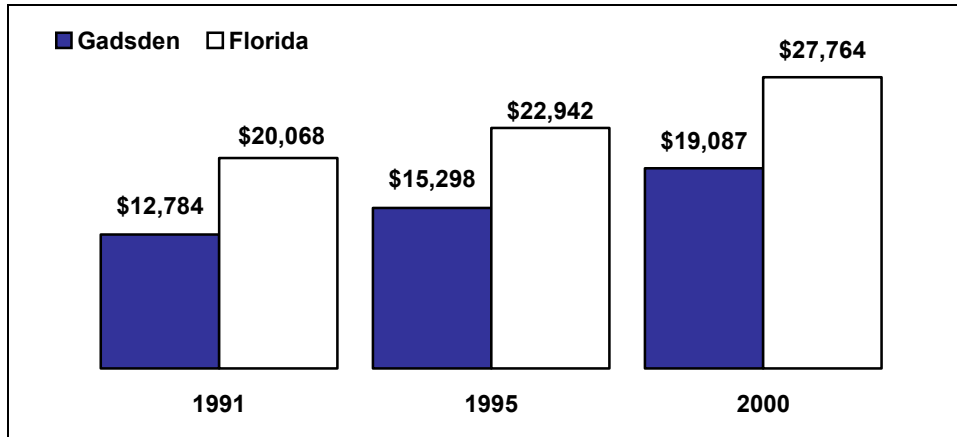
As of July 1, 2001, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that the total population of Gadsden County was 45,321. The county's population increased by 10% between 1990 and 2000, which was much slower than the state's growth rate of 24% during that same time period. The entire population of the county lives in unincorporated areas. The major population center is Quincy, the county seat.

Of the county's population, 99% consider themselves one race, while the remaining 1% consider themselves multi-racial. The largest percentage (57.1%) of the population is Black or African American, with persons of Hispanic or Latino origin comprising 6% of the population, compared to the statewide figure of 17%. In addition, 39% of the county's residents are White, which is lower than the statewide figure of 78%. The racial/ethnic composition of the student population differs slightly from the county population. The racial/ethnic composition of the student population is Black or African American 84%, Hispanic or Latino origin 9%, White 6%, and students considering themselves multiracial 1%.

Approximately 20% of Gadsden County's population is of school age (5 to 17 years old) while an additional 7% are less than five years old. By contrast, 12% of the county's population is 65 years old or older. Approximately 71% of the county's residents aged 25 years or older are high school graduates, while 13% have graduated from college. These percentages are lower than the statewide figures of 80% and 22%, respectively. This means that the level of educational attainment in Gadsden County is lower than it is across the state.

Gadsden County's per capita income in 2000 was \$19,087, which was \$8,677 below the state average. As shown in Exhibit 1-2, the per capita income of Gadsden County residents has been consistently lower than the per capita income of the state as a whole.

**Exhibit 1-2  
Per Capita Income of Gadsden County Residents  
Was \$8,677 Below the State Average in 2000**



Source: Florida Research and Economic Database, 2002.

While 20% of the county’s residents live below the poverty level, a larger percentage of the county’s children (27%) live below the poverty level. These figures are higher than for the state as a whole. This corresponds with the relatively higher percentage of school children that are eligible for a free or reduced price lunch.

Gadsden county’s unemployment rate has been similar to the state’s unemployment rate for the past five years. This suggests that students who graduate from high school in Gadsden County should not have more difficulty finding employment than graduates in other parts of the state. Gadsden County has a civilian workforce of 20,480 people. The county’s primary sources of employment include the service industries related to agriculture, construction, finance, insurance, and real estate, 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 17 schools, as shown in Exhibit 1-3.

**Exhibit 1-3  
Gadsden County Operates 17 Schools**

Number and Type of School		
8 - Elementary Schools	1 - Alternative Education School	1 - Charter School
2 - Middle Schools	4 - High Schools and Combination Middle and High Schools	1 - Vocational School

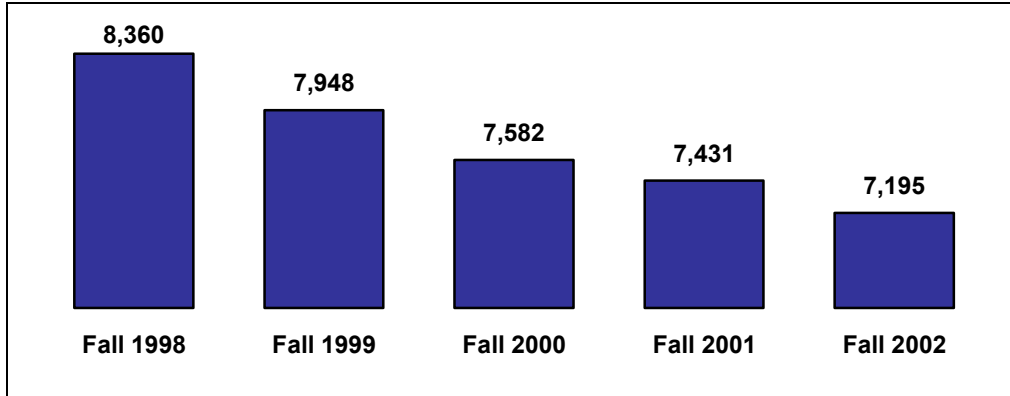
Source: Florida Department of Education (2001-02).

With 7,195 students in 2002-03, the Gadsden County School District is the 25<sup>th</sup> smallest of the state’s 67 school districts. The student population growth has decreased between 1998-99 and 2002-03, for a total

*Introduction*

net decrease of 14% (see Exhibit 1-4). This decreasing rate was in contrast to the 9% increase in enrollment across the state.

**Exhibit 1-4  
Enrollment in Gadsden County Has Decreased Over the Past Five Years**



Source: Florida Department of Education (January 2003).

The Gadsden County School District expended \$57.7 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 1-5 describes the district's revenue, expenditures, and fund balances for the 2001-02 fiscal year.



**Exhibit 1-5  
District Funds Include Federal, State, and Local Sources  
and Expenditures Are Primarily Related to Instruction**

<b>Revenues and Expenditures</b>		<b>Total</b>
<b>Revenues</b>		
Federal Direct		\$2,516,398
Federal Through State		7,915,879
State		42,555,922
Local		6,325,868
Other		457,748
<b>Total Revenues</b>		<b>\$59,771,815</b>
<b>Expenditures</b>		
Instruction		\$27,854,657
Pupil Personnel Services		2,322,824
Instructional Media Services		1,236,567
Instruction and Curriculum Development Services		1,820,761
Instructional Staff Training		594,774
Board of Education		425,094
General Administration		816,279
School Administration		3,429,442
Facilities Acquisition and Construction		321,646
Fiscal Services		333,498
Central Services		866,261
Pupil Transportation Services		2,695,162
Operation of Plant		3,624,376
Maintenance of Plant		1,765,144
Community Services		1,071,450
Fixed Capital Outlay:		
Facilities Acquisition and Construction		7,284,389
Other Capital Outlay		1,233,654
<b>Total Expenditures</b>		<b>\$57,695,978</b>
<b>Excess (Deficiency) of Revenue Over Expenditure</b>		<b>\$2,075,837</b>
<b>Other financing sources:</b>		
Operating Transfers In		\$499,712
Insurance Loss Recoveries		\$7,866
Operating Transfers Out		(1,454,821)
Other		3,185,250
<b>Total Other Financing Sources</b>		<b>\$2,238,007</b>
Net Change In Fund Balances		4,313,844
Fund Balance July 1, 2001		3,807,541
<b>Fund Balances, June 30, 2002</b>		<b>\$8,121,385</b>

Source: Florida Auditor General Annual Audit, Ending Fiscal Year 2002.

As Exhibit 1-6 illustrates, the percentage of administrators and instructional staff are similar in the Gadsden County School District to those districts used for comparison. Exhibit 1-7 illustrates the actual numbers of administrators, instructional personnel, and support positions in the district.

**Exhibit 1-6  
Staffing Ratios Fall in the Middle for All Comparisons**

School District	Staff Ratios					
	Administrators to Classroom Teachers	Administrators to Total Instructional Staff	Administrators to Total Staff	Classroom Teachers to Students <sup>1</sup>	Teacher Aides to Classroom Teachers	Guidance to Students
Columbia	1: 13.47	1: 14.64	1: 29.33	1: 16.92	1: 3.21	1: 478.90
Dixie	1: 7.93	1: 8.56	1: 19.25	1: 17.83	1: 2.22	1: 453.00
Jackson	1: 12.1	1: 14.2	1: 27.05	1: 15.51	1: 2.93	1: 305.16
Jefferson	1: 7.66	1: 8.40	1: 18.73	1: 14.85	1: 3.59	1: 569.33
Madison	1: 6.74	1: 7.33	1: 16.07	1: 18.91	1: 2.45	1: 860.75
<b>Gadsden</b>	<b>1: 7.47</b>	<b>1: 8.42</b>	<b>1: 17.62</b>	<b>1: 16.85</b>	<b>1: 3.19</b>	<b>1: 412.94</b>
<b>State</b>	<b>1: 14.45</b>	<b>1: 16.2</b>	<b>1: 29.64</b>	<b>1: 18.26</b>	<b>1: 4.28</b>	<b>1: 455.37</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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, 2001-02.

**Exhibit 1-7  
Gadsden County School District Employed 1,040 Staff in Year 2001-02**

Full-Time Employees	Number	Percentage
Administrators	59	5.7%
Instructional	497	47.8%
Support	484	46.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,040</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Profiles of Florida School Districts (2001-02).

The Gadsden County School District faces a number of distinct challenges. For example, the district has a rural population that is distributed throughout the district in challenging feeder patterns. In addition, the district is experiencing a unique demographic shift in which the overall county population is increasing, but student enrollment is decreasing. Many of the challenges faced by this district will be discussed throughout this review.

# 2

## Management Structures

### *Summary*

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The Gadsden County School District is using 12 of 14 of the best practices in management structures. The school board and superintendent have policies and procedures in place to ensure the district is effectively run and oversee its financial resources. The district has reviewed its administrative staffing levels, given principals sufficient authority to manage their schools, considered options to increase revenues, involved the community in decision making, and developed a system to accurately project enrollment. To use the remaining best practice standards, the district should prioritize the goals and objectives in its strategic plan, ensure that all strategic plan objectives are measurable, and annually review progress towards achieving strategic plan goals and objectives. The district also should develop links between the strategic plan and its budgeting process.

### *Background*

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The Gadsden County School District's has both an elected superintendent and an elected five-member board. School board members are elected from single member districts to a four-year term. Two members are elected at the time of the presidential general election, and three are elected at the time of the gubernatorial general election.

The district has a relatively new board, with only one member elected before 1998. The two newest members were elected for their first term in 2002 and the third new member was elected in 2000. The remaining two members were recently reelected in 2000 and 2002. Exhibit 2-1 shows the length of time board members have served.

#### **Exhibit 2-1 Most Board Members Are Serving in Their First or Second Term**

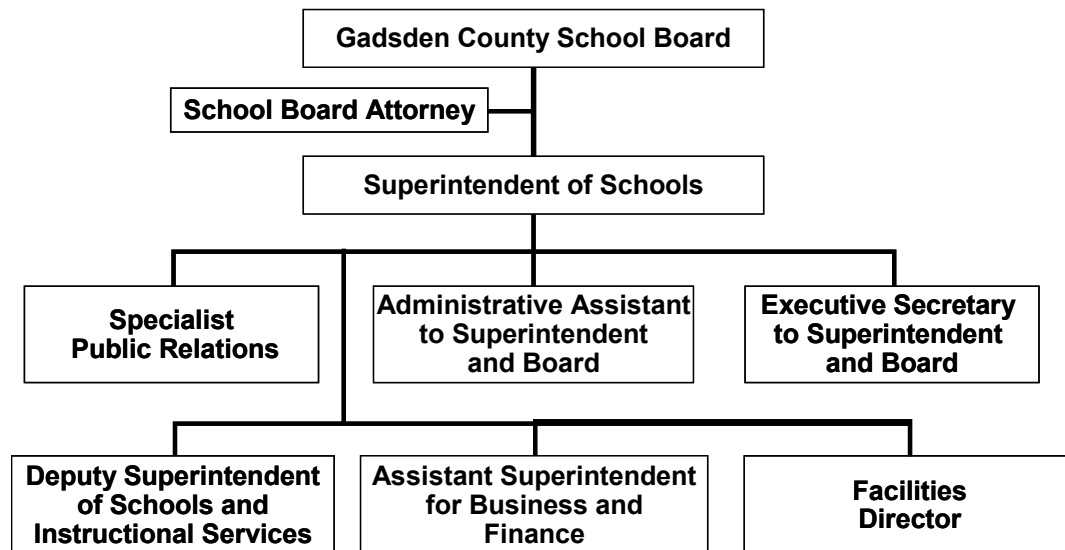
<b>Board Member</b>	<b>Tenure</b>
Roger P. Milton	Elected for first term in 2000, up for reelection in 2004
Isaac Simmons	Elected for first term in 1998, reelected in 2002, up for reelection 2006
Catherine S. James	Elected for first term in 1992, reelected in 2000, up for reelection in 2004
Judge B. Helms, Jr.	Elected for first term in 2002, up for reelection in 2006
Charlie D. Frost	Elected for first term in 2002, up for reelection in 2006

Source: Gadsden County School District.

The current superintendent, Sterling DuPont, was elected in 2000. He is a native of the district and graduated from high school in Gadsden County. He previously served as a teacher in Gadsden County School Districts and also held the positions of teacher, assistant principal, principal, and district officer in the Broward County School District. He was also the Florida Department of Education State of Florida Resident Principal from 1994-1996. The superintendent holds a master’s degree in education from Florida Atlantic University and certifications from the Superintendent Chief Executive Officer Leadership Development Program.

The superintendent is the chief executive and administrative officer of the board and, as such, is responsible for organizing the district’s administration. Exhibit 2-2 illustrates the current district-level administrative structure. The district’s school-level administration is limited to the principals and assistant principals of the district’s eight elementary schools, including the Midway Magnet School, two middle schools (grades 6 to 8), two high schools (grades 9 to 12), two combination middle and high schools (grades 7 to 12), one alternative school (which includes two off-site programs), and one vocational technical school (which provides courses in Quincy and at Florida State Hospital).<sup>1</sup>

**Exhibit 2-2  
The Gadsden County School District’s Administrative Structure  
Includes the School Board, a Superintendent, a Deputy Superintendent,  
Two Assistant Superintendents, and a Facilities Director**



- Instructional PK-12
  - Instructional Media
  - Exceptional Student Education
  - English Speakers of Other Languages
  - Adult and Vocational Education
  - Guidance and Health Services
  - Grants, School Choice, Title I
  - Transportation
  - Data Processing
- School Food Services

Source: Gadsden County School District.

<sup>1</sup> Gadsden County also has one charter school for grades K to 8. Subsequent to our field work, the district consolidated two of its high schools into one.

The Gadsden County School District joined the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium (PAEC) on June 30, 2001. The district is planning to use some of the PAEC member services in the future. PAEC is an educational consortium of 13 members and 8 participating school districts located across Florida’s panhandle.<sup>2</sup> The consortium’s board of directors is composed of the superintendent from each member district. The board of directors appoints an executive director who administers PAEC’s day-to-day operations. The PAEC board, in consultation with its administrators, selects the services the consortium will provide. The purpose of the consortium is to provide common administrative services in a way that maximizes economies of scale to minimize the cost of these services for each member and participating school district. PAEC provides more than 20 administrative services including cooperative purchasing, risk management, data processing and Management Information Systems (MIS), professional development, grant procurement and coordination, and strategic planning. Each school district has the option of participating in any or all of the consortium’s services or programs. Member districts receive most of these services at little or no charge (the state provides funding that is significantly subsidized by federal, state, and private grants), while participating districts pay fees for services.

## Issues Affecting District Finances

As Exhibit 2-3 illustrates, the district’s General Fund or operating revenues declined over the last three years while the capital project fund and total revenue have increased. The decrease in the General Fund (12% between Fiscal Years 2000-01 and 2002-03) was associated with declining student enrollment. During this period, the district experienced a 6% decline in enrollment, (a reduction of 402 students, see Exhibit 2-4). Gadsden County School District administrators reported that parents transferred their children to schools in neighboring school districts because they believed there were too many disruptive students in Gadsden County schools and other districts offered better educational services. This decline in enrollment contributed to a \$5 million reduction in the district’s operating budget.

### Exhibit 2-3

#### Although the Gadsden County School District’s Total Revenues Increased by 12%, Its Operating (General Fund) Revenues Have Decreased 12% Over the Past Three Years

	Fiscal Year		
	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03 Budget
<b>Revenue</b>			
General Fund	\$42,391,460	\$39,090,435	\$37,500,000
Special Revenue – Food Services	3,311,513	3,648,919	3,450,000
Special Revenue – Other	8,766,435	10,216,593	10,000,000
Debt Service Funds	261,663	256,967	260,000
Capital Projects Funds	4,041,889	12,310,363	15,000,000
Less Transfers	-46,800	0	0
From Capital Projects Funds	195,126	0	0
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$58,921,286</b>	<b>\$65,523,277</b>	<b>\$66,210,000</b>

Source: Gadsden County School District and Florida Office of the Auditor General.

<sup>2</sup> Member districts are those that fall below 10,000 students and have been invited to join the consortium by the board. Participating districts are larger districts, which may access PAEC services for a fee. Participating districts do not have a voting right on the board. Gadsden is a member district.

## Management Structures

The district's capital projects funds significantly increased from Fiscal Years 2000-01 and 2002-03 due to it building a new high school, East Gadsden High School, that is scheduled for completion in time for the 2003-04 school year. The district received funding to help build this high school from the state's Special Facilities Construction Account.<sup>3</sup> The district will pay approximately \$4.5 million and the state will pay \$25.2 million to build this new school.

### Exhibit 2-4 Gadsden County School District Is Experiencing a Decline in Enrollment

Fiscal Year	Full-Time Equivalent Student Enrollment <sup>1</sup>	Percentage Change in Enrollment from Prior Year
2000-01	6,986.07	
2001-02	6,822.22	-2%
2002-03	6,584.29	-4%
<b>Change from 2000-01 to 2002-03</b>	<b>-402</b>	<b>-6%</b>

<sup>1</sup> The numbers in this exhibit are full-time equivalent (FTE) students, which is a calculation of the number of students in certain programs for a school year or its equivalent. Most school district funding from the state is based on the number of FTE students. The number of students shown in this exhibit differs from the enrollment numbers shown in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4. The numbers in Chapters 1 and 4 are based on FDOE membership counts, which are essentially a headcount of the number of students.

Source: Gadsden County School District and Florida Department of Education.

The decline in enrollment has caused the Gadsden County School District to underutilize its school facilities. For example, as discussed in the background section of Chapter 7 (Facilities Construction), two of the district's senior high schools (Havana Northside High School and James A. Shanks High School), one combination school (Chattahoochee High School), and one elementary school (Havana Elementary School) use 55% or less of their capacity. One of its schools, Chattahoochee High School, has a 37% utilization rate. The majority of the district's facilities have utilization rates of less than 75% (see Exhibit 7-1 in Chapter 7).

Low facility utilization rates are an inefficient use of resources. School operating costs do not decline commensurately with a decrease in the number of students enrolled. The physical plant of schools must still be cleaned and maintained and heated and cooled. The district must provide a sufficient number of teachers, administrators (e.g., school principals), and programs to meet state curriculum requirements and the special needs of students.

To address problems resulting from aging facilities and underutilization, the district has established a long-range facilities plan to build new schools, close down schools that are underutilized and/or in poor condition, and consolidate students into newer and fewer schools. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, the district's plan includes building two new high schools and a new elementary school. The plan calls for consolidating students into the new schools and rearranging the current use of facilities so that six school sites can be closed and four can be converted to other uses.<sup>4</sup> In the long run, this plan will

<sup>3</sup> The Special Facilities Construction Account of the Public Education Capital Outlay and Debt Service Trust Fund was established by the Florida Legislature to enable school districts with insufficient capital resources to meet urgent educational facilities construction needs. A district is eligible to receive a grant funding the construction of a new school once every three years. In turn, the school district is required to have levied the maximum allowable capital outlay assessment under Florida law, 2 mills against property values, and pay back to the special facilities account an amount equal to 1.5 mills of the assessment every year for three years.

<sup>4</sup> The school sites that would be closed are Midway Magnet School, Havana Northside High School, Chattahoochee High School, Greensboro Elementary, Gretna Elementary, and St. Johns Elementary. Carter Parramore Middle School would be converted to housing administrative personnel and alternative programs. Greensboro High School would be converted to accommodate Greensboro Elementary School. Shanks High School would be converted to accommodate Carter Parramore Middle School. Quincy Educational Academy would be partially renovated to accommodate the students currently housed in the relocatables comprising the Midway Magnet School.

address the district's declining student enrollment and limited funding. By closing schools that are underutilized and/or in poor condition and replacing these schools with fewer and newer facilities, the district will consolidate responsibility for and reduce costs associated with school operations and maintenance. The district also should save on other costs such as salaries and benefits for principals, teachers, and support personnel.

However, recent changes in state law may require the district to address its underutilization of facilities sooner than outlined in its long-range plan. Beginning in Fiscal Year 2003-04, district school boards are required to allocate to each school 90% of the funds generated by the school from the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP), including gross state and local funds, discretionary lottery funds, and funds from the district's current operating discretionary millage levy. FEFP funding is based upon enrollment FTEs, and is the primary source of funding for school districts. Consequently, schools that are underutilized/under capacity may have substantially higher operational costs than would be justified by their student enrollments, and state funds may not cover these costs. This may result in the district having to take such action as closing or consolidating the underutilized schools, or reducing non-core subject course offerings, unless the local community steps forward and helps support the school's non-instructional operations.

# Conclusion and Recommendations

## Summary of Conclusions for Management Structures Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
<b>Board and Superintendent Roles and Responsibilities</b>	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	2-7
	2. The board and superintendent have procedures to ensure that board meetings are efficient and effective.	Yes	2-8
	3. The board and superintendent have established written policies and procedures that are routinely updated to ensure that they are relevant and complete.	Yes	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.	Yes	2-9
<b>Organization, Staffing and Resource Allocation</b>	5. The district's organizational structure has clearly defined units and lines of authority that minimize administrative costs.	Yes	2-9
	6. The district periodically reviews its administrative staffing and makes changes to eliminate unnecessary positions and improve operating efficiency.	Yes	2-10
	7. The superintendent and school board exercise effective oversight of the district's financial resources.	Yes	2-10
	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	2-10
<b>Planning and Budgeting</b>	9. The district has a multi-year strategic plan with annual goals and measurable objectives based on identified needs, projected enrollment, and revenues.	No	2-11
	10. The district has a system to accurately project enrollment.	Yes	2-13
	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	2-13
	12. When necessary, the district considers options to increase revenue.	Yes	2-14
<b>Community Involvement</b>	13. The district actively involves parents and guardians in the district's decision making and activities.	Yes	2-14
	14. The district actively involves business partners and community organizations in the district's decision making and activities.	Yes	2-15



# 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.**

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. In Florida, unlike most other states, many superintendents are elected rather than appointed by the school boards. This has the potential to further undermine effective working relationships particularly when the school board and superintendent have substantially different philosophies and opinions on key issues. 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.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. The roles and responsibilities of the board and superintendent are clearly defined through school board rules and the training board members receive. Although the board and the superintendent do not have written policies, the unwritten policies they use have resulted in an effective working relationship.

However, the board could enhance its operations by conducting a self assessment of its performance. This process should focus on whether the board as a whole has worked effectively in providing overall guidance and direction necessary for the district to achieve its objectives.<sup>5</sup> A board that works effectively will be better able to provide the leadership the district needs to achieve its strategic plan goals. 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 specific 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 it can be improved.

**We recommend that the board establish a process for the board to conduct a self-assessment of its performance once a year.**

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<sup>5</sup> This process should not be structured to focus on the performance of individual board members.

## Best Practice 2: Using

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

The primary goal of all school board meetings should be to come to a decision in a timely manner on the majority of policy issues presented during a particular meeting. To meet this goal, 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 is 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 p.m.). If possible, board meeting should be broadcast live, or taped for later broadcast, on local public access television channels.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. The board has established policies in the school board rules to ensure that board meetings are efficient and effective. These meetings are convenient to the public, being held at 6 p.m. at the district offices, and agenda items are pulled from the consent agenda for public comment upon request.

However, the district could enhance its operations by improving agenda summaries and simplifying budget information. According to board members, the current agenda item summaries are generally adequate, but could be improved to provide additional useful information. For example, summaries could show how each agenda item supports the district strategic plan goals and objectives, identify fund amounts as either revenues or expenditures, and include statements of an item's positive and negative financial effects on the district. Key information on budget documents such as spreadsheets could be highlighted to make the information easier for board members to find.

If board members had more complete agenda item summaries, board meetings would run even more efficiently and members would have more time to consider issues and proposed solutions. We observed a board meeting in which board members asked district employees numerous additional questions despite the fact that the board members had obviously reviewed the agenda packets. As an alternative to expanding agenda item summaries, the board may wish to consider scheduling workshops a few days before board meetings to review agendas and information packets and have district employees address their questions.

**We recommend that the district improve the summaries for board meeting agenda items or schedule routine workshops to review items to be brought before the board.**

## Best Practice 3: Using

**The board and superintendent have established written policies and procedures that are routinely updated by legal counsel to ensure that they are relevant and complete.**

Up-to-date districtwide procedures, when coupled with appropriate policies, ensure that activities are carried out in an efficient and effective manner. In addition, relevant and complete policies help ensure that districts are in compliance with federal and state laws and 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 become. All

districts should have, at 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 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

#### **Best Practice 4: Using**

**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.**

School boards should have appropriate, responsive legal counsel to address legal issues as they arise. 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 expenses (including hourly rates, retainer fees, and total annual expenditures) should be evaluated for accuracy and appropriateness.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

## **ORGANIZATION, STAFFING AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION**

#### **Best Practice 5: Using**

**The district's organizational structure has clearly defined units and lines of authority that minimize administrative costs.**

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); and 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.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **Best Practice 6: Using**

**The district periodically reviews 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **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 accomplish this, the superintendent and board members must understand the fiscal implications of their decisions, both short and long-term. In addition, if and when financial problems arise, the superintendent and school board must be able to react quickly and responsibly, and in a manner that prevents significant disruption of school district 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.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **Best Practice 8: Using**

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

Principals should have the authority and ability to manage the day-to-day operations of their schools with minimal interference from the district office. 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 end, 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. School principals have discretion over how they spend some of their funds. Principals also have flexibility over the mix of teachers and support staff at their schools and the teaching strategies they use. The district annually reviews the principals and holds them accountable for their performance and adhering to district procedures.

However, the district could improve its use of site-based management by providing principals with additional budget training so that they will better understand the spending restrictions and flexibility of the various fund categories they control at the school level. Some principals told us they do not sufficiently understand the restrictions and flexibility of the various funding categories in their budgets. For example, when they want to purchase an item or service and there is not enough money in the funding category they normally use to pay for it, they cannot determine for themselves what other fund categories they can use. Instead, they must call the assistant superintendent for Business and Finance to ask whether another fund category can be used for the purchase. This issue will become more important as the district shifts to full implementation of site-based management with recent changes in state law, as discussed on page 5 of this chapter. Subsequent to our fieldwork, the district provided additional budget training to principals. We encourage the district to continue with its efforts.

**We recommend that the district continue to provide site-based managers with budget training as needed to understand spending restrictions and flexibility of the various funds they control at the school level. This will enable them to better manage their funds to meet school needs.**

## PLANNING AND BUDGETING

### Best Practice 9: Not Using

**The district has a multi-year strategic plan with annual goals and some measurable objectives, but the school board has not prioritized these goals and objectives and does not annually review district progress towards achieving them.**

Strategic planning enables a district to identify its critical needs and establish strategies and reallocate resources to address these needs. To ensure that all critical needs are identified, the strategic planning process should include broad stakeholder input. The decisions made during the strategic planning process should be in writing and the resulting plan should guide both policymaking and program development. The strategic plan also should address both instructional and non-instructional programs and have reasonable goals and objectives that can be accomplished, in most cases, within available resources. 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 Gadsden County School District has a multi-year strategic plan with four goals and some measurable objectives (see Exhibit 2-5). The first goal, student achievement, and the third goal, meeting stakeholder needs, and their associated measurable objectives meet the intent of this best practice. In the second goal, safety, the objective for reducing the number of reported incidents is measurable.

**Exhibit 2-5  
The Gadsden County School District's  
Strategic Plan Has Four Priority Goals With Associated Objectives**

Goals	Objectives
<p><b>I</b> By June 30, 2004, student test scores will result in all Gadsden County Schools receiving a rating of "B" or better</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reading – All third grade students in the regular curriculum will be reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade.</li> <li>2. Reading – All students in grades 3-10 in the regular curriculum will master the Sunshine State Standards as measured by the FCAT/NRT.</li> <li>3. Writing - All students in grades 3-10 in the regular curriculum will score 3 or better using the Florida Writes rubric.</li> <li>4. Math - All students in grades 3-10 in the regular curriculum will master the Sunshine State Standards as measured by the FCAT/NRT.</li> </ol>
<p><b>II</b> By June 30, 2004, all Gadsden County Schools will have improved levels of safety in which to learn and work.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Values and Behaviors – Over the four-year period, staff and student behavior will result in at least a 50% annual decrease of documented incidents as reported in the School Environmental Safety Incident Reporting (SESIR) data.</li> <li>2. Physical Facility – Facilities will be clean, well lit, well used and maintained (safe, organized storage).</li> </ol>
<p><b>III</b> By June 30, 2004, all Gadsden County Schools will be effectively meeting the needs of all stakeholders.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Customer Satisfaction – 90% of parents, staff, and students will respond positively on climate surveys regarding positive environment and parental involvement.</li> <li>2. Recruitment and Retention – Gadsden County School system will have a highly qualified workforce consisting of certified administrators and teachers and competent non-instructional personnel. At least 99% of teachers and 97% of administrators will be in field. At least 99% of each class of employee will have overall satisfactory evaluations.</li> </ol>
<p><b>IV</b> By June 30, 2004, all departments are working interdependently to ensure highest student achievement and all programs and personnel in the Gadsden County School System will be operating at an increased level of effectiveness</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Personnel – Effective evaluation and accountability systems are in place for all personnel.</li> <li>2. Curriculum - The curriculum is aligned to meet FCAT standards and instructional techniques are designed to promote student comprehension and achievement.</li> <li>3. Operations – All planning and decisions are coordinated between all departments (Personnel, Curriculum, and Instruction, Operations) to support student achievement. Meeting and decision making process reflect collaborative input.</li> <li>4. Operations – Structured budgeting process that gets everyone involved and reflects the priorities to the district strategic plan.</li> </ol>

Source: Gadsden County School District.

However, the Gadsden County School District is not using this best practice for three reasons.

First, not all of the objectives for strategic plan goals are measurable, such as the objective listed for the second goal (safety) of having clean, well lit, well used and maintained facilities, and all of the objectives listed for the fourth goal (interdependent departments and effective personnel and programs). Further, as discussed in Chapter 3, the district has not established any measurable objectives for its food service, transportation, and maintenance programs, in either the strategic plan or program-level documents.

Second, the board does not annually assess the progress made toward achieving strategic plan objectives. Assessing progress towards strategic plan objectives would help the board and the superintendent determine if programs they have put in place are working and should be continued and/or expanded or should be discontinued.

Third, the board has not established priorities for its strategic plan's goals to guide the district's major financial and program decisions. The district does not know how much it will cost to implement its strategic plan. District staff told us they do not have the resources to pursue all the strategic plan's goals and objectives because of the district's decreasing general fund. Therefore, the board needs to prioritize strategic plan goals and objectives to guide district employees on where to focus their efforts.

Action Plan 3-1 in Chapter 3 includes recommendations to address these issues. Subsequent to our field work, the district began to take steps to implement Action Plan 3-1 and has recently developed a new strategic plan.

## **Best Practice 10: Using**

### **The district has a system to accurately project enrollment.**

Full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment projections are used for many things in districts including budgeting and funding, zoning, estimates of facility requirements and staffing ratios. Because of the critical nature of FTE projections, school districts must have a system to the most accurate student enrollment projections possible. Thus, districts must have trained staff and formal procedures for applying both the state projection methodologies and local corrective methodologies, which can be very complex and often require considerable technical expertise. At a minimum, the district must use the cohort survival methodology provided by the Florida Department of Education 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. The district is using methods accepted by the Department of Education to project its enrollment and its latest enrollment projections are within the standard 2% margin of error. However, the district could improve its operations by documenting its enrollment projection methodology. Only two people in the district understand the methodology used to project student enrollment and currently this methodology is not in writing. If one or both of them were to leave, it would take time for other district employees to develop expertise in using the methodology. By documenting its projection methodology, the district could better assume that its employees continue to make reasonably accurate enrollment projections in the future.

**We recommend that the district document its enrollment projection methodology.**

## **Best Practice 11: Not Using**

### **The district does not link its financial plans and budgets to its annual priorities in the strategic plan.**

Like most other organizations, because school districts generally have seemingly unlimited demands for available funds, they must set budget priorities. Thus, a school district's financial 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 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 Gadsden County School District is not using this best practice. The board has not established priorities for its strategic plan goals (as discussed in Best Practice 9) and so is unable to link its priorities with its budget. Also, district administrators told us that they do not have the funding flexibility to link the budget to the strategic plan. Due to the district's declining enrollment and subsequent declines in operational funds, the district has been trying to maintain existing operations and has not redirected funds toward achieving strategic plan goals and objectives.

Action Plan 3-1 in Chapter 3 includes recommendations to more directly link district priority goals and objectives to its budget as part of the strategic planning process.

### **Best Practice 12: Using**

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

A school district may find it necessary to consider raising additional revenue if it has done everything in its power to streamline processes and minimize costs and it still cannot meet critical student and/or staff needs without additional funds. 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

## **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

### **Best Practice 13: Using**

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

To be successful in educating students, 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 be actively involved in the educational process, parents must be aware of and encouraged to participate in school activities and decision making processes that affect their children.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. The schools communicate information to parents and have various organizations in which parents can become involved to improve the schools. For example, parents participate in school advisory council decision making.

However, the district could improve its operations by using additional media to inform parents and other taxpayers of opportunities to become involved in the schools. Currently, most district and school information for parents consists of documents sent home with students. Although sending documents home to parents is one way to keep them informed about school information and events, it is not designed to reach other district stakeholders, such as taxpayers who do not have children in public school. The district and individual schools have made limited use of the Internet to inform citizens of upcoming district and school events. The district and schools should use the Internet to inform district parents and citizens of opportunities for getting involved in school organizations and decision making. Using the



Internet is an inexpensive way to communicate with parents, and information on district and school websites can be easily updated.

**We recommend that the district expand the use of district and school websites to distribute information to parents and other taxpayers and encourage involvement in district and school activities.**

### **Best Practice 14: Using**

**The district actively involves business partners and community organizations in the district's decision making and 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. Thus, school districts and individual schools should actively engage local and regional businesses and community groups so that these entities will participate in educational activities. 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 should also 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

# 3 Performance Accountability Systems

## *Summary*

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The Gadsden County School District is not using the three performance accountability best practices. To begin using these three best practices, the district should ensure that its performance accountability system is more effective by developing more specific goals and measurable objectives for its non-instructional program areas and establish program-level goals and performance objectives for specific educational programs. The district also should formally evaluate its performance against objectives and act on the results of those evaluations. Finally, the district should start reporting more performance information to the general public, such as through improvements to the district's Internet web page or an annual report printed in a local newspaper.

## *Background*

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The Gadsden County School District developed a four-year strategic plan adopted in Fiscal Year 2000-01. The strategic plan contains goals, objectives, strategies for accomplishing them, and the district employees responsible for implementing the strategies. The district has also developed data collection systems for some of the goals and objectives in the strategic plan

# Conclusion and Recommendations

## Summary of Conclusions for Performance Accountability Systems Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
<b>Goals and Measurable Objectives</b>	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, 3-8, 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. <sup>1</sup>	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.	No	3-4

<sup>1</sup> Each district should define those programs considered “major” within the two broad areas of educational (instructional) and operational (non-instructional) programs. At a minimum, they should include the programs listed. However, the district should have some defensible, logical criteria to identify major instructional and non-instructional 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 a satisfactory performance accountability system.**

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.

The Gadsden County School District has established some accountability mechanisms for its educational and safety programs. As shown in Exhibit 2-5, the district has established some goals and measurable objectives for these two programs in its strategic plan. The district also has established performance measures and data collection systems to monitor progress towards achieving these objectives. The strategic plan also specifies strategies for obtaining objectives, the starting date for implementing the strategies, and who is responsible for implementing them.

However, the district is not using this best practice for three reasons. First, it has not established measurable objectives for its food service, transportation, and maintenance programs in either the strategic plan or program-level documents. Program directors should establish goals and measurable objectives, communicate them to employees and the public, and collect and use performance data on short-term operational objectives to routinely monitor performance. They should also present data on longer-term objectives to the school board or public to indicate things are moving in the right direction.

Second, the district has not established program-level goals and performance objectives for specific educational programs, including K-12 basic education, Exceptional Student Education (ESE), at-risk programs (such as English for Speakers of Other Languages or ESOL and alternative education), accelerated, and vocational and adult education. While the district strategic plan contains broad district-level educational goals in the areas of reading, writing, and math, it does not include goals for sub-groups of students.

Third, the district has not developed performance measures and data collection systems for assessing its progress towards achieving strategic plan objectives relating to employee recruitment and retention, and budgeting and planning. The district should use existing data collection systems to the extent possible to provide information on its performance in achieving these objectives.

To improve operations and meet the intent of this best practice, the district should expand its strategic plan. With some modification, the strategic plan can serve as a tool for communicating the board's strategic priorities and direction. For instance, to be a more effective in providing overall strategic direction, the plan should be expanded to include high-level goals that reflect the school board's priorities across programs, and measurable objectives that clearly communicate the board's expected outcomes for each objective in the plan.

In addition, for each major educational and operational program, the district should identify supporting measures that reflect the primary purpose of each program that managers can use to monitor performance. These measures should specifically address the performance and cost of each of the district's major programs. Action Plan 3-1 provides a mechanism to help the district expand its strategic plan and

enhance its performance accountability system.<sup>1</sup> Program-level accountability is discussed in more detail in the areas of maintenance (Best Practice 2 of Chapter 8), transportation (Best Practice 1 of Chapter 9), and food service (Best Practice 1 of Chapter 10). Subsequent to our field work, the district began to take steps to begin to implement Action Plan 3-1 and has recently developed a new strategic plan. We encourage the district to continue with this effort.

## **Best Practice 2: Not Using**

**The district does not formally evaluate the performance of its major instructional and non-instructional programs and use the 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.

The Gadsden County School District is not using this best practice because it has not conducted evaluations of its instructional or non-instructional programs. Program evaluations focus on program results, efficiency, and effectiveness by examining broad issues such as program structure and administration and whether the program is meeting its intended purpose. These evaluations are designed to reduce district risk of funds being used inefficiently or programs operating in a manner that endangers students or does not adequately serve them.

To improve its operations and meet the intent of this best practice, the district will need to develop a process to evaluate program performance. We recommend that the district develop a plan to use performance information to improve its programs. This plan should concentrate on areas of greatest risk in the district for both instructional (e.g., federal programs or others in which noncompliance could result in fines or loss of funding) and non-instructional areas (as discussed in Best Practice 2 of Chapter 8, Best Practice 1 of Chapter 9, and Best Practice 1 of Chapter 10), as well as those areas identified as priorities in the district strategic plan. These evaluations should also examine areas of need or opportunities for continued improvement. Action plan 3-1 provides a mechanism to help the district evaluate performance and enhance its performance accountability system.

## **Best Practice 3: Not Using**

**The district does not clearly report on the performance and cost-efficiency of its major instructional and non-instructional programs to ensure accountability to parents and other taxpayers.**

Regular performance reports help to ensure that school board members and the public are aware of the efficiency and effectiveness of the school district in meeting its major goals and objectives. 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 more public support than if they did not provide accountability information.

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<sup>1</sup> The district may choose to develop its program-level accountability separately from its strategic plan. If it chooses to do so, it still needs to improve and expand its strategic plan as described in Chapter 2 (Management Structures).

As required by state law, individual Gadsden schools provide some reports to parents about the educational performance and environment in that school. This is primarily accomplished through the School Public Accountability Report, which is sent home with students for the parents to read. However, this report focuses on student performance and not on the performance of operational programs or fiscal conditions.

To improve its operations and meet the intent of this best practice, the district will need to report on the performance and cost-efficiency of its major programs. In general, there are no formal feedback mechanisms other than board meetings to address poor performance and inefficiency. Developing a performance accountability system and regularly reporting performance and cost-efficiency information to the board would better inform board members and the public about the district’s accomplishments. Reporting to the public could also be accomplished by printing an annual report in a local newspaper or expanding the district website to include more performance-related information. Action Plan 3-1 provides a mechanism to help the district implement this recommendation. In implementing the steps in Action Plan 3-1, the district should also incorporate the steps outlined in Action Plans 11-4 and 11-5 in Chapter 11 (Cost Controls).

**Action Plan 3-1**

**We recommend that the district develop measurable objectives and measures for all of its major instructional and non-instructional programs, develop performance measure data collection mechanisms so that progress in achieving objectives can be measured, conduct in-depth evaluations of programs exhibiting poor performance, and report program performance to the board and the public.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Identify a few high-level outcome and efficiency measures for inclusion into the district’s strategic plan that reflect board priorities for educational and operational programs and services and rank the measures in their order of importance. In addition, for each major educational and operational program identify supporting measures that reflect the primary purpose of each program that managers can use to monitor performance. The district may wish to consider adopting measures provided in Appendix A.<sup>1</sup></p> <p>Step 2. For each performance measure, identify the data needed and determine the information below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Who will collect performance data and how often?</li> <li>▪ What is the source of the data (e.g., state or district reports)?</li> <li>▪ In what format is the data needed?</li> <li>▪ How often should the data be collected?</li> <li>▪ Who (program staff, department head, assistant superintendent, superintendent, school board) will the data be reported to and how often?</li> <li>▪ How should the data be used?</li> </ul> <p>Step 3. Identify and prioritize data needs by classifying data into the following two categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ data currently available, accessible, and in the format needed to determine progress toward program goals and objectives and</li> <li>▪ data currently either not available, accessible or in the format needed to determine progress toward program goals and objectives.</li> </ul> <p>Step 4. For each measure, determine a standard (benchmark) for performance the district would like to achieve, which may be based on past performance, the performance of comparable districts, or industry standards.</p> <p>Step 5. For each measure or related measures develop a written statement (objective) that indicates the desired performance (result) or improvement target. For academic programs, objectives should be stated in terms of student outcomes (that is, the effect the program will have on participating students if the program is successful). For operational programs, objectives should be stated in terms of the quality and cost of service provided or desired performance.</p>
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*Performance Accountability Systems*

Objectives should be

- either short-term (two to three years) or mid-term (four to five years);
- address major aspects of the program’s purpose and expenditures;
- be specific;
- be easily understood;
- be challenging but achievable;
- be measurable and quantifiable;

Examples of objectives include:

“The food service program will maintain a labor margin of \_\_\_% in 2003-04.”

“By 2005, the facilities department will decrease average energy cost per gross square foot from \$\_\_\_\_\_ to \$\_\_\_\_\_ which is consistent with the average of its peers (identify peers).”

“By 2004, the maintenance department will reduce number of custodians per net square foot to \_\_\_\_\_ which is consistent with the industry standard of 1: \_\_\_\_\_.”

“By 2005, FCAT scores for alternative education students will meet or exceed the state average.”

- Step 6. Link the district budget to the priorities established in the strategic plan.
- Step 7. Periodically compare district performance data to data from other, comparable districts or programs to determine whether the district could improve its operations.
- Step 8. Based on the ongoing analysis described in Step 7 above, identify undesirable trends in performance and cost that need more in-depth evaluation.
- Step 9. Conduct more in-depth evaluations to identify the cause and potential remedies to address trends identified in Step 8. Put the results of these in-depth evaluations in writing. Provide the written results of in-depth evaluations to the school board.
- Step 10. At least annually, report performance related to high-level measures to the school board and the public.
- Step 11. Annually review, and if necessary, amend the strategic plan to reflect changes in community standards, student needs, or board direction.

Who Is Responsible	Superintendent and the school board
Time Frame	July 2005

<sup>1</sup> The district is taking steps to begin to implement Action Plan 3-1 and has recently developed a new strategic plan.

# 4

## Educational Service Delivery

### *Summary*

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The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of 4 of the 12 educational service delivery best practices, but still could enhance operations in those areas. For the last two years, the district has been implementing strategies to improve low performing schools, and is putting systems in place to improve district oversight of schools. However, to meet standards for the remaining 8 best practices and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its educational programs, the district should

- use non-academic as well as academic data to identify needs, evaluate programs, and plan for student improvement;
- expand support for Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs, and develop systems for tracking processes and outcomes of the program;
- improve programs for at-risk students, including taking steps to ensure compliance with state regulations for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs, and providing adequate alternative education and in-school suspension programs;
- increase the effectiveness of the school improvement planning process;
- plan for the effective progression of students between grade levels;
- re-examine the organizational structure of education departments in the district office;
- integrate technology into the K-12 curriculum; and
- develop a plan for improving the delivery of student support services.

### *Background*

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The Gadsden County School District served 7,431 students during the 2001-02 school year with an ethnic breakdown of 84% black, non-Hispanic, 9% Hispanic, 6% white, non-Hispanic, 1% multiracial, and less than 1% each Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaskan Native. Student enrollment during the 2002-03 school year was 7,195.<sup>1</sup> The district has 17 schools, including eight elementary schools, two middle schools, four high schools or combination middle and high schools, one charter school, one adult center, and one alternative education school that provides programs at three different locations.<sup>2</sup> All

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<sup>1</sup> The number of students differs from figures found in Chapter 3, because that chapter uses a full-time equivalent (FTE) calculation that weights enrollment in certain programs, and serves as a basis for state funding.

<sup>2</sup> Gadsden County opened a new public high school at the beginning of the 2003-04 school year. East Gadsden High consolidates the student bodies of the former Shanks and Havana Northside high schools. The county also has two private schools, which serve around 700 elementary and secondary students.



district K-12 schools are designated as school-wide Title I schools, which means they serve a high percentage of at-risk students.

Student demographics present multiple challenges for the Gadsden County School District. The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced priced lunch, which is a poverty indicator, is the highest in the state (76.6%). OPPAGA has found that schools serving a large percentage of children from low-income families often have lower performing students.<sup>3</sup> The performance of Gadsden County students reflects this trend. As shown in Exhibit 4-1, 62% of the schools graded by the state Department of Education for 2002 received a grade of D or F.<sup>4</sup> For 2003, the overall percentage of low performing schools declined to 43%, but there was an increase in the number of failing schools, i.e., schools receiving a grade of F.

**Exhibit 4-1  
Gadsden County’s Schools Are Low Performing<sup>1</sup>**

Year	School Grade				
	A	B	C	D	F
1999-2000	0	0	1	13	0
2000-2001	1	1	3	10	0
2001-2002	0	1	4	6	2
2002-2003	1	2	5	2	4

<sup>1</sup> Not all of the district’s 17 schools receive a Florida Department of Education (FDOE) grade each year. For example, new schools are not graded, and schools with a low percentage of students participating in the FCAT receive an “Incomplete” in lieu of a grade.  
Source: Florida Department of Education

Absenteeism among Gadsden County students is high, contributing to the district having the second lowest graduation rate in the state and a dropout rate that is well above the state average. Student discipline is also a concern. The discipline rate for elementary students is more than double the state average, while high school students are suspended at a rate that is almost 40% higher than the state average.<sup>5</sup>

For Fiscal Year 2001-02, the district’s operating costs were \$4,766 per student, higher than the state’s average operating cost of \$4,378. Over the last five years, the district has had the second greatest decline in student enrollment in the state, which has resulted in a reduction in state general education funds to Gadsden County.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, however, the district has received additional funds through the Title I program, which provides federal and state funds for schools that serve a high percentage of at-risk students, and through state supplemental funding for districts with low-performing schools.

The Gadsden County School District’s deputy superintendent of Schools and Instructional Services oversees the seven departments that provide instructional and support services to the district’s schools.<sup>7</sup> As shown in Exhibit 4-2, each program director reports directly to the deputy superintendent.

<sup>3</sup> *Improving Student Performance in High-poverty Schools*, OPPAGA Report No. 96-86, June 1997.

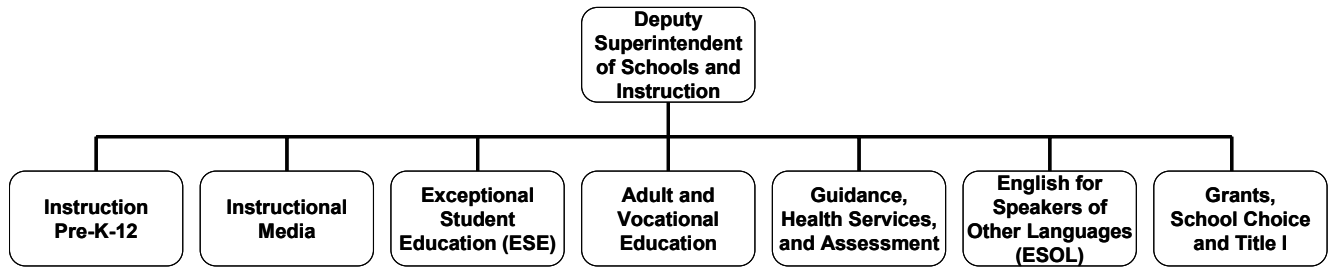
<sup>4</sup> Combination schools receive a single grade, which is sometimes presented separately by grade level, e.g., the grade may be presented once as a middle school grade and again as a high school grade. Exhibit 4-1 lists a single grade for each combination school.

<sup>5</sup> Data for these indicators are presented later in this chapter in Exhibits 4-4, 4-5, and 4-7.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 2 for more information about declines in district enrollment and funding.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to overseeing instructional programs, the deputy superintendent of Schools and Instructional Services is responsible for transportation and data processing.

**Exhibit 4-2  
Seven Departments Oversee District Level Educational Service Delivery Functions**



Source: Gadsden County School District.

The district serves students through a variety of types of programs, described below.

***K-12 Basic Education.*** Basic education refers to curriculum and instruction offered to students in pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Curricula for the core academic subjects are tied to the Sunshine State Standards (SSS) and grade-level expectations, which serve as the basis of Florida’s student assessment system, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).

***Exceptional Student Education (ESE).*** Exceptional Student Education programs serve students with special education needs (developmentally, physically, or mentally impaired or handicapped, gifted students, and students who are hospitalized or homebound). The program provides special materials and educational services to ensure that eligible students receive a free education through the public school system that maximizes their learning. Nineteen percent (19%) of Gadsden County School District students are served in ESE programs; 18% are students with disabilities, and 1% are gifted.

***At-Risk Programs.*** The Gadsden County School District provides several programs for students who need academic or social skills interventions to assist them to be successful.

- All district K-12 schools provide school-wide *Title I* programs, which provide ancillary support services in schools with high concentrations of impoverished students.
- The district uses the inclusion approach to educate non-English speaking students in *English for Speakers of Other Languages* (ESOL) programs. With this approach, students are taught language arts by an ESOL specialist, and are placed in the regular classroom for all other subjects. Five percent (5%) of the Gadsden County School District’s students are served in ESOL programs.
- *Alternative education* programs provide an alternative setting for students who are not successful in a regular school setting, or cannot be served in regular schools because they have been recommended for expulsion; have been referred by the court system; or require intensive support through a specialized Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program.
- *Dropout prevention* programs, including a teen parent program, serve students at-risk of dropping out of school before earning a high school diploma.

***Accelerated Programs.*** The Gadsden County School District provides students several accelerated learning opportunities.

- *Honors classes* provide more challenging work for students that perform at a high level.
- *Dual Enrollment* allows high school students to enroll in courses that provide both high school and college credit.
- *The Florida Virtual School* provides classes on-line, which allows students to learn at their own pace and study subjects that cannot be offered on a regular basis, given small student enrollment figures.

The district does not have advanced placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) programs.

***Vocational and Adult Education.*** The district's secondary vocational and technical education program provides vocational programs for secondary students and adults, as well as adult literacy programs, e.g., courses that prepare adults to take the General Educational Development (GED) test.<sup>8</sup> Gadsden County does not have a community college, but the school district has an articulation agreement with Tallahassee Community College (TCC) in adjoining Leon County, which allows students to begin a program of studies in Gadsden County and then transfer to TCC to complete the program. The district's strongest vocational program is in licensed practical nursing, and was established based on Gadsden County's identified need for health care workers.

***Student Support Services.*** Although the Gadsden County School District does not have a Student Support Services Department to help students overcome problems that could interfere with their academic success, it provides psychological services through the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program and provides guidance services in each school. The district also partners with the Gadsden County Department of Health to provide students with school health services.

The [Florida Department of Education website](#) contains more detailed information about the state's K-12 programs, as well as links to reports that compare Gadsden County student demographics and performance with other school districts.

## **Activities of particular interest**

***Student Access to Accelerated Classes.*** Due to small enrollment numbers, which is a function of the dispersed population in rural Gadsden County, not all district schools offer accelerated learning opportunities and courses that students may need to meet college admission requirements.<sup>9</sup> To ensure accessibility for interested students, the district uses a hub concept and buses students to a single location for college preparatory classes. For example, when Chattahoochee High School did not offer language or advanced science classes because of the low student demand, students were bused to Shanks High School in Quincy for these classes.

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<sup>8</sup> GED tests enable individuals who have not graduated from high school to demonstrate the attainment of competencies normally acquired through completion of a high school program of studies.

<sup>9</sup> According to district staff, enrollment figures are also low because a small number of students meet academic criteria for placement in accelerated classes.

# Conclusion and Recommendations

## Summary of Conclusions for Educational Service Delivery Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
<b>Effective and Efficient Instructional Programs</b>	1. District administrators use both academic and nonacademic data to guide them in their decision making about improving K-12 education programs.	No	4-6
	2. The district provides effective and efficient Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs for students with disabilities and students who are gifted.	No	4-8
	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).	No	4-10
	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).	Yes	4-14
	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.	No	4-15
	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.	No	4-16
	8. The district's organizational structure and staffing of educational programs minimizes administrative layers and processes.	No	4-17
<b>Effective and Efficient Instructional Support</b>	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	4-18
	10. The district has sufficient school library or media centers to support instruction.	Yes	4-19
	11. The district utilizes instructional technology in the classroom to enhance curriculum and improve student achievement.	No	4-19
	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.	No	4-20

# EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

## Best Practice 1: Not Using

**District administrators do not 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 Gadsden County School District uses data to monitor student academic performance, and provides training so that schools know how to use the data. A district leadership team meets regularly to discuss the performance of district schools, and school administrator's report that the district is responsive to their requests for data reports that help them identify needs.

However, the district does not meet standards for this best practice for two reasons. First, the district does not adequately use all relevant data to guide decision making about education programs. As highlighted later in this chapter, although factors such as absenteeism and discipline problems impede student academic performance and should therefore be taken into account when making decisions about how to improve programs, the district has not implemented effective strategies to address these two issues. Action Plan 4-8, which appears later in this chapter, includes steps for using nonacademic data to assess needs and guide decision making about the support services district students may need in order to succeed academically.

Second, student performance is low, and despite its efforts, the district has not made significant progress in improving performance. As shown in Exhibit 4-3, student performance in Gadsden County is well below the state average in both reading and math for all grade levels. In the lower grades, assessment scores have steadily improved over the last three years, but remain low. At the high school level, there has been little improvement. In 2003, over 90% of tenth grade students scored in the lowest two levels in reading, i.e., below a level 3.<sup>10</sup> Approximately 60% of these students scored at level 1, a score that represents performance below basic ability. Low FCAT scores are a primary reason the district has such a high number of schools receiving grades of D and F.

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<sup>10</sup> FCAT performance is reported by achievement level, as well as by raw scores. Level 1 represents the lowest level of achievement, while Level 5 represents the highest level.

**Exhibit 4-3  
Most Gadsden County School District Students Perform Significantly Below  
the State Average on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test<sup>1</sup>**

		Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 8		Grade 10	
		Percentage of Students Scoring Below Level 3		Percentage of Students Scoring Below Level 3		Percentage of Students Scoring Below Level 3		Percentage of Students Scoring Below Level 3	
		Gadsden	State	Gadsden	State	Gadsden	State	Gadsden	State
<b>Reading</b>	2001 <sup>1</sup>	70%	47%	-	-	85%	57%	85%	62%
	2002	65%	45%	71%	46%	81%	55%	93%	65%
	2003	53%	40%	64%	43%	75%	52%	91%	65%
<b>Math</b>	2001 <sup>1</sup>	-	-	72%	52%	72%	45%	66%	41%
	2002	73%	50%	74%	52%	71%	47%	73%	40%
	2003	65%	45%	70%	49%	61%	44%	72%	39%

<sup>1</sup> Trend data is not available for all grade levels presented, as fourth and fifth graders were not tested in all subjects in 2001.

Source: Florida Department of Education.

The district also performs poorly on other academic indicators.. For example, as shown in Exhibit 4-4, the Gadsden County School District has a very low graduation rate (the second lowest in the state), and a dropout rate higher than most peer districts and the state average. District and school employees believe that these student outcomes are related to poor academic achievement, as well as the student discipline and attendance problems discussed later in this chapter. <sup>11</sup>

**Exhibit 4-4  
Gadsden County Has the Lowest Graduation Rate of Its Peers, and the  
Dropout Rate Is Higher than Most of Its Peers and Well Above the State Average**

District	Four-Year Graduation Rate	Annual Dropout Rate
Dixie	75.1	3.3
Columbia	68.1	1.4
<b>State</b>	<b>67.9</b>	<b>3.2</b>
Jefferson	64.5	3.6
Madison	63.8	5.4
Jackson	59.6	2.3
<b>Gadsden</b>	<b>52.4</b>	<b>4.4</b>

Source: Florida Department of Education data for the 2001-02 school year.

A pattern of low performance makes families eligible for Opportunity Scholarships, which allows them to withdraw their children from the low performing schools. <sup>12</sup> Florida law provides these scholarships to attend private or higher performing public schools in cases when a school receives a grade of F for two years in a three-year period. Students of one district school, Shanks High School, are currently eligible for Opportunity Scholarships, as the school received a grade of F for both 2002 and 2003. Three other district schools received a grade of F for 2003, and are at risk of entering the category in 2004. The Gadsden County School District, a small, rural school district with a large number of low performing schools, may encounter exceptional difficulties in fulfilling the state mandate regarding school choice, especially for high school students. The district has only two private schools, and none of the district

<sup>11</sup> Exhibits 4-5 and 4-7 provide data about discipline rates and student attendance.

<sup>12</sup> Chapter 1002.38, F.S.

high schools meet the C grade threshold for accepting students from low performing schools.<sup>13</sup> This limits the school choice options available to families in Gadsden County.<sup>14</sup>

Given the importance of ensuring that all students perform at their grade level, and the potential consequences of a lack of improvement in school grades in Gadsden County, the district needs to continue with its efforts to improve student performance. Action Plan 4-7, which appears later in this chapter, contains steps to address academic improvement.

## **Best Practice 2: Not Using**

### **The district does not provide 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 the intent of 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 district should be commended for two aspects of its ESE program. First, unlike many small districts, Gadsden preserves general education funds by billing Medicaid for eligible administrative and direct services.<sup>15</sup> Second, it has attempted to provide opportunities to African-American students in gifted programs by establishing a magnet school.

Despite these strengths, the Gadsden County School District does not meet best practice standards for ESE programs for three reasons.<sup>16</sup> First, the district does not regularly disaggregate student academic and nonacademic data, establish objectives, develop strategies, and track outcomes for Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs. Action Plan 3-1 included recommendations to improve planning and evaluation for all district programs, including ESE.

Second, the district does not have an adequate system for monitoring program processes. As a result, it does not know if it is assessing and placing students in exceptional education programs in a timely manner, and is not able to identify and correct problems contributing to reported delays in the process. The lack of monitoring also means that the district is not able to assess the effectiveness of the child study team process in identifying disabled students. For example, it does not know if students are being appropriately referred for assessment. In addition to the effect on students, delayed and inappropriate referrals can have a fiscal impact on school districts, as the assessment process can involve costly assessments by psychologists and other professionals. Action Plan 4-1 outlines steps for improving operations in this area.

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<sup>13</sup> However, the Florida Department of Education (DOE) plans to assign a C grade to the new district high school, East Gadsden High, which is the new consolidated high school consisting of students formerly zoned for Shanks High School and Havana Northside High School. According to DOE staff, the state's historical practice is to start all new schools with a C grade.

<sup>14</sup> Chapter 1002, *F.S.*, codifies Florida's school choice options.

<sup>15</sup> The district seeks Medicaid reimbursement for administrative, physical therapy, occupational therapy and behavioral services. It does not bill for speech services because most of the individuals providing those services do not meet Medicaid certification standards. As discussed in Chapter 9, it also does not bill for transportation services.

<sup>16</sup> In most districts, ESE disabled students tend to perform at a lower level than the general student population. This is also the case in Gadsden County, although the poor performance of district ESE students is consistent with the generally low performance of the district's non-disabled student population. Therefore, our recommendations to improve student performance discussed throughout this report pertain to ESE students as well as to the broader student population.

**Action Plan 4-1**

**We recommend that the district develop and implement a system for monitoring Exceptional Student Education (ESE) processes to ensure the timely evaluation and placement of students.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Map steps in the ESE student assessment and placement process; identify data elements needed to track processes, such as the number of days elapsed from referral to assessment or from assessment to placement; and modify district information systems to generate appropriate monitoring reports. Also track the percentage of referred students identified as qualifying for exceptional student education services.</p> <p>Step 2. Establish goals, methods and timeframes for monitoring and reporting of student status. Information should be disaggregated by type of exceptionality and by school.</p> <p>Step 3. Develop annual district objectives and strategies for improvement. Provide schools with technical assistance to ensure that school improvement plans address performance gaps, and to help the schools achieve annual performance objectives.</p> <p>Step 4. Annually assess school and district performance in relation to established objectives, and report results to the school board. Include an assessment of barriers to attaining goals.</p>
Who Is Responsible	ESE director and program staff; school advisory councils; school-based ESE teachers
Time Frame	2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter

The third reason the district does not meet best practice standards for ESE programs is that the district lacks services to meet the needs of ESE students and support for teachers working with them. To its credit, the district strives to serve students in the least restrictive environment, and attempts to mainstream them into programs where they can earn a regular high school diploma. But such placements should be based on the needs and capacities of students, or the practice can place unrealistic demands on students and regular classroom teachers. Teachers and guidance counselors, as well as district and school level administrators believe that some Gadsden County students may be inappropriately placed in regular classes. Florida Department of Education data supports this perception. In some instances, Gadsden County’s disabled students spend significantly more of their day in regular classrooms, i.e., with non-disabled peers, than the state average. For example, 62% of Gadsden’s Educable Mentally Handicapped (EMH) students spend 40% or more of the day in regular classrooms, while statewide, only 37% of EMH students spend that amount of time with non-disabled peers. This comparative data suggests that Gadsden County’s regular classroom teachers have a larger role in educating ESE students than teachers in other districts.<sup>17</sup>

A related concern is that the district does not provide teachers with adequate support for serving ESE students. Administrators and teachers we spoke to cite a lack of time for routine consultations between classroom teachers, ESE teachers and district specialists, and the lack of adequate assistance with delivering a curriculum in classrooms with broadly differentiated student needs.<sup>18</sup> The district's use of out-of-field teachers for ESE programs exacerbates the lack of support for serving ESE students. During the 2002-03 school year, 14 of the district’s 52 ESE teachers (27%) were teaching out of field, which means they were not certified to teach ESE students, supervise ESE paraprofessionals, or provide assistance to regular classroom teachers.

Additional concerns about the district’s ESE program are addressed in a 2003 Florida Department of Education review. The district’s high dropout rate for ESE students triggered the review, which identified 10 areas of critical concern: staff training and knowledge; student attendance; dropout prevention

<sup>17</sup> Comparative information is presented for 2001-02, the most recent year for which data is available.

<sup>18</sup> District personnel raised this concern regarding many sub-groups of students, not just ESE students.



strategies; least restrictive environment; behavior/discipline; curriculum; assessment; post-school transition; and record and forms reviews.<sup>19</sup>

Action Plan 4-2, below, includes steps to improve the ESE program, and incorporates the Florida Department of Education's requirement that the district develop system improvement strategies to address critical issues identified during its recent review of the Gadsden County program. In addition, Action Plan 4-7, later in this chapter, addresses curriculum development needs for all district students, including ESE students.

### Action Plan 4-2

**We recommend that the district conduct a comprehensive assessment of its ESE program to evaluate whether it has sufficient policies in place to ensure programs meet student needs.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Conduct an assessment of district policies for placing ESE students, including placement options, decision criteria, and the kinds of supports available for teachers working with ESE students in regular and self-contained classrooms.</p> <p>Step 2. Identify the needs for ESE certified employees in schools. Determine the barriers that have hindered prior recruitment efforts, and identify recruitment resources and incentives that can be used to attract ESE teachers.</p> <p>Step 3. Based on teacher input, develop a plan for providing support for teachers working with ESE students.</p> <p>Step 4. Develop and implement the system improvement plan required by the Florida Department of Education.</p> <p>Step 5. Regularly assess progress in increasing district support for serving ESE students. In addition to developing systems to ensure teachers receive needed support, solicit feedback from administrators, non-instructional personnel and parents.</p>
Who is Responsible	Deputy superintendent for Schools and Instruction, ESE director and program staff, school-based ESE teachers
Timeframe	2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter

### Best Practice 3: Not Using

**The district does not provide 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.<sup>20</sup>**

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 also should periodically assess the progress of at-risk students making adjustments to programs as needed to ensure that students perform to their capacity.

The Gadsden County School District should be commended for an alternative education program that has had success in keeping at-risk students in school. The program provides an array of educational and support services to meet the needs of students who need a more structured environment because of behavior or learning difficulties, or require a non-traditional educational setting because their age and

<sup>19</sup> On May 30, 2003, the Florida Department of Education released the *Final Report of Focused Monitoring of Exceptional Student Education Programs in Gadsden County: March 4-6, 2002*.

<sup>20</sup> These are students who need academic and/or social skills interventions to assist them to perform to their capacity.

grade level are not commensurate. The district’s alternative education school, the Quincy Educational Academy, places a priority on promoting parent involvement in the education of their children, and has a dropout rate of 1.6%, which compares very favorably to the district’s overall rate of 4.4%. The school currently serves fewer than 150 students, most of whom have discipline problems, and there is a waiting list for placement.

Despite the success of the alternative education program, the district does not meet standards for serving at-risk students for four reasons. First, as discussed in other parts of this chapter, district students perform at a very low level. Since the entire student population of the district is served in schools with school-wide Title I programs for at-risk students, there is no distinction in Gadsden County between outcomes for Title I and regular student programs.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, recommendations and action plans found throughout this chapter that relate to increasing the effectiveness of education programs incorporate our assessment of Title I programs, and we do not repeat those recommendations and action plans here.

Second, the district does not have a sufficient number of bilingual staff to provide non-English speaking students with the support they need to be successful in classes taught in English. Since the district does not follow the requirement that schools with 15 or more students speaking the same language have a bilingual teacher or paraprofessional, it is out of compliance with the state’s plan for ESOL education. The state plan was established by consent decree to prevent involvement by the Federal Office of Civil Rights in the state’s endeavors to teach students whose native language is not English. District employees cite recruitment difficulties for the lack of compliance.

Action Plan 4-3 includes steps the district could take to achieve compliance with ESOL regulations.

**Action Plan 4-3**

<b>We recommend that the district develop and implement a plan to recruit bilingual teachers or paraprofessionals to bring it into compliance with state requirements for ESOL programs.</b>		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Identify the needs for bilingual staff in schools, and determine the barriers that have hindered prior recruitment efforts.
	Step 2.	With technical assistance from the Florida Department of Education and the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium, as needed, identify recruitment resources and incentives that can be used to attract bilingual teachers and paraprofessionals.
	Step 3.	Present plan to school board for approval and action.
Who Is Responsible	School board; superintendent of schools; ESOL coordinator; assistant superintendent of Human Resources, Policy, and Staff Development; and Florida Department of Education	
Time Frame	2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter	

Third, the district does not have adequate programs to meet the needs of students at-risk of dropping out of school before earning a high school diploma. As shown in Exhibit 4-4, presented earlier in this chapter, the district has a high dropout rate and a low graduation rate. Also, as shown in Exhibit 4-5, below, district students exhibit behaviors that likely present barriers to learning and can affect promotion and graduation. Given these indicators, more district students may benefit from an alternative educational setting.

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<sup>21</sup> Schools with more than 50% of the student body qualifying for free or reduced lunch may elect to implement school-wide Title I programs, rather than establish separate programs to serve the majority sub-set of students.

**Exhibit 4-5  
Discipline Rates in Gadsden County Schools  
Are Significantly Higher than the State Average**

Type of School	Suspension Rates	
	Gadsden County	Statewide
Elementary Schools	9.8%	4.0%
Middle Schools	37.0%	30.5%
High Schools	39.3%	28.5%

Source: Florida Department of Education data for 2001-02.

The district should expand access to alternative education programs for students who may benefit from an alternative education placement, and explore ways to use alternative education programs to address the identified discipline and dropout problems in the district. Any program expansion should include a plan for improving the academic performance of students attending the district’s alternative education school, as well as an evaluation structure to determine if increased use of the alternative education program is one effective way of addressing district problems. Expansion should also incorporate the development of model dropout prevention and behavior management strategies that could be exported to other district schools. If the district re-assigned staff from other schools, the fiscal impact of expanding the number of placement slots in the alternative education program could be negligible.

Action Plan 4-4 includes steps the district could take to increase its support for at-risk students.

**Action Plan 4-4**

**We recommend that the district expand access to alternative education programs for students who may benefit from an alternative education placement, and explore ways to use alternative education programs to address the identified discipline and dropout problems in the district.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Establish a team made up of district and school staff to be responsible for reviewing the district’s use of its alternative education program, and coordinating with other district-level planning initiatives.</p> <p>Step 2. Conduct a needs assessment and plan for expanding the program that incorporates both educational and behavioral components, and includes: an assessment of finances and staffing needs; a suggested organizational and communication structure for administering and monitoring the school; criteria for admitting students; and criteria for assigning qualified instructional staff to the program.</p> <p>Step 3. Present plan to school board for approval and action.</p>
Who Is Responsible	School Board; deputy superintendent of Schools and Instruction; principal of district alternative education school; designed team members
Time Frame	2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter

The fourth reason the district does not meet best practice standards for at-risk students is its high use of out-of-school suspension. As shown in Exhibit 4-6, the district uses out-of-school suspensions at a significantly higher rate than the state average. The practice of sending students home for suspensions increases the risk of academic failure and dropping out, as students miss the educational content that prepares them for promotion and graduation.

**Exhibit 4-6  
Gadsden County Schools Use Out-of-School Suspensions More than the State Average**

Type of School	Percentage of Students Receiving Out-of-School Suspensions	
	Gadsden County	Statewide
Elementary Schools	8.1%	2.4%
Middle Schools	26.7%	14.3%
High Schools	23.9%	12.5%

Source: Florida Department of Education, data for 2001-02 school year.

To achieve administrative efficiencies and educational integrity, the district should consider centralizing an education-based suspension program at a single location. Given the connection between behavior problems and suspension, the school board should consider establishing an in-school suspension program within the alternative education school. Action Plan 4-5 includes steps for improving services for at-risk students by revising the district’s suspension programs.

**Action Plan 4-5**

**We recommend that the district increase its use of in-school suspension programs, so that students can continue to be engaged in educational programs while serving the consequence for inappropriate behavior. The school board should consider centralizing operations, and establishing an education-based suspension program within the alternative education school.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Disaggregate student suspension data to clarify how the suspension option is used in the district. Identify trends and needs, and determine barriers that have prevented the district from using education-based suspension programs.
	Step 2.	Review district policies related to student behavior and suspension to ensure they are specific and reasonable, and emphasize the need for education-based suspension programs that are integral to the curriculum of each school.
	Step 3.	Develop a tiered suspension program, ranging from removal from class, to placement in a centralized in-school suspension program, to recommendation for alternative placement, to out-of-school suspension.
	Step 4.	Identify resource needs in the areas of facility, staffing, training, curriculum, and program monitoring and evaluation.
	Step 5.	Present plan for increasing the use of in-school suspension to the school board for approval and action.
Who Is Responsible	School Board; deputy superintendent of Schools and Instruction; district and school staff.	
Time Frame	2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter	

**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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. The district provides students with opportunities to enroll in honors and advanced placement classes, and offers a dual-enrollment program with Tallahassee Community College (TCC), located in adjoining Leon County. However, a small number of students participate in accelerated programs, and the district does not compile and summarize data to assess how well students perform in the programs. The district could improve its operations by implementing the following recommendation.

**We recommend that the district continue its efforts to provide accessibility to accelerated programs by using a hub concept (bussing students to a single secondary school site) to provide advanced placement and honors classes. The district should step up its recruitment efforts in an attempt to increase the number of students participating in advanced placement classes, and should use student performance data to evaluate the success of the instruction provided in accelerated programs.**

### **Best Practice 5: Using**

**The district provides effective and efficient workforce development programs (such as vocational-technical, adult basic education, and adult high school 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 they 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 a 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. It provides vocational programs for secondary students and adults, as well as adult literacy programs. Because a high percentage of district students require daily remediation in core academic subjects, a small number of secondary students pursue programs of study at the district vocational center. However, district high schools also offer a limited number of vocational programs.

In addition, while the county does not have a community college, the school district has an articulation agreement with Tallahassee Community College in adjoining Leon County. However, the district has not established strong partnerships with other community organizations concerned with workforce development, and could improve its operations by implementing the recommendation below.

**We recommend that the district take steps to ensure that its workforce programs are responsive to community needs. Specifically, the district should**

- **coordinate with business and industry as well as postsecondary education institutions, and increase participation with the Regional Workforce Development Board;**
- **establish advisory committees with broad-based representation to help develop and oversee programs; and**
- **explore ways to meet the workforce preparation needs of a larger number of secondary students, many of whom will not pursue postsecondary education because of their academic limitations.**

## **Best Practice 6: Not 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 I, etc.) and incorporates and integrates to the extent possible other school-level improvement planning processes (Title I, technology, school improvement, Sterling, etc.).

To increase the effectiveness of the school improvement process, districts should provide training for school improvement teams that includes using academic and nonacademic 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.

The Gadsden County School District ensures that schools use integrated planning processes, and provides assistance with data needed to identify needs. The school board also requires periodic status reports on School Improvement Plans (SIPs) from school principals. In addition, during the 2002-03 school year, two district schools received supplemental assistance through the Florida Department of Education's Assistance Plus outreach program for the state's lowest performing schools.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the district does not meet standards for this best practice because the district does not provide sufficient guidance to schools in planning to meet the educational needs of their students.

We note three specific weaknesses in the school improvement planning process. First, schools do not consistently address nonacademic needs and the needs of sub-groups of students in SIPs. Second, although most SIPs have clear and measurable objectives, the plans do not always have clear strategies for achieving the objectives. Finally, some district school improvement plans do not correspond closely with the district's strategic plan, which affects the district's ability to use SIP data as a source of information to assess progress towards meeting district objectives. Given the academic performance of the district, the district needs to maintain a close tie between school-level and district-level planning and reporting processes.

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<sup>22</sup> Shanks High School and Stewart Street Elementary School each received a grade of F for the 2001-02 school year, and therefore receive planning assistance, as well as supplemental resources, through Assistance Plus. This assistance will also be available to the district schools that received an F for the 2002-03 academic year.

Action Plan 4-6 includes recommendations to assist the district in meeting best practice standards for school-level planning and evaluation processes.

**Action Plan 4-6**

**We recommend that the district provide additional guidance to schools, to help them effectively plan to meet the educational needs of their students.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Work with the Florida Department of Education to provide district staff with adequate training to oversee the improvement planning process for district schools.</p> <p>Step 2. Identify model school improvement plans (SIPs), and train school-level administrators and advisory council members in how to develop, implement and monitor such plans.</p> <p>Step 3. Establish a formal review process for school improvement plans, which lays out required components, e.g., including academic and nonacademic needs, and specifies criteria for district review and approval of the plans.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Florida Department of Education; district and school staff; school advisory councils
Time Frame	2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter

**Best Practice 7: Not Using**

**The district does not ensure 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 for core academic subjects. 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 also should periodically assess how well their students progress and use this information to make adjustments as needed.

The Gadsden County School District has a student progression plan and curricular guides, i.e., Scope and Sequence notebooks, which incorporate the Sunshine State Standards and grade level expectations. The student progression plan also contains policies related to student promotion and graduation, which includes expected levels of performance on the FCAT.

However, the district is not using this best practice. The district does not ensure that students master necessary skills and will be able to perform at the next grade level before promoting them. Student performance is low and a large number of students require remediation. This indicates that students are not adequately prepared when they are promoted from one grade level to the next.

Also, the Gadsden County School Board does not consistently apply the district’s student progression plan. In 2001, it waived district promotion requirements when a significant number of students did not meet board requirements for FCAT scores. That year, it retroactively removed FCAT promotion requirements for students in grades 10 and below. Given the large number of students performing below grade level, the district needs to consistently apply its student progression policy.

Action Plan 4-7 includes recommendations to assist the district in meeting best practice standards for student progression.

**Action Plan 4-7**

<b>We recommend that the district enhance its efforts to ensure that students perform at grade level.</b>		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Continue to implement remediation strategies to assist low-performing students achieve grade-level proficiency in core academic subjects.
	Step 2.	Modify district school board policy to prevent the practice of waiving retention and promotion requirements for the sole purpose of reducing the number of students retained. The board should adhere to promotion policies subsequent to the receipt of student FCAT scores.
	Step 3.	Continue to share effective teaching practices by using district specialists to develop teaching materials, provide training, and coach individual teachers; and using verified expert teachers to tape demonstration lessons, and cataloging the tapes for later use by all district teachers.
	Step 4.	Improve curriculum support for teachers by: revising the district’s Scope and Sequence notebooks, which serve as curriculum guides, to include all core subjects, and to incorporate differentiated teaching strategies for students with special needs; and training school level administrators, such as assistant principals, to provide site-based leadership in linking the curriculum with the Sunshine State Standards and grade level expectations.
	Step 5.	Develop and implement a system for feeder pattern schools to identify and address student deficiencies.
Who Is Responsible	District superintendent and school board members; district staff; principals; assistant principals	
Time Frame	2003-2004 academic year; ongoing thereafter	

**Best Practice 8: Not Using**

**The district’s current organizational structure and staffing of educational programs does not 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.

In recent years, the district has re-evaluated positions and organizational structures to increase the level of support to schools facing significant challenges in improving student performance. As a result, the current organizational structure and staffing of educational programs provides schools with support and oversight in most major areas

However, the Gadsden County School District does not meet best practice standards in this area. Given district characteristics, needs are high and employees are stretched thinly across schools and programs. In addition, the district does not have a social studies curriculum specialist or a specialist to evaluate education programs. Action Plan 4-7, above, includes steps for increasing the level of curriculum support for teachers, which is the greatest area of need.

Although it does not prevent it from meeting best practice standards for organizational structure and staffing, the district also needs to consider if fine tuning the organizational structure of education programs could enhance operations. For example, as shown in Exhibit 4-2, earlier in this chapter, each education program director reports independently to the deputy superintendent of Schools and Instruction. With this structure, responsibility and accountability are not always aligned. Further, the structure has the



potential to impede coordination and communication among departments. For example, the director of pre-K through 12 education programs has responsibility for overseeing the school improvement planning process, while a staff person in the Exceptional Student Education program is responsible for monitoring a key component of the process, i.e., ensuring appropriate representation of school, parent and community groups. The district could address potential problems with the organizational structure by implementing the recommendation below.

**We recommend that the district assess the adequacy of its district-level organizational structure for education programs. It should re-examine roles and responsibilities, and fine tune job descriptions and expectations to support an integrated approach to decision making and accountability.**

Another concern related to the staffing of educational programs is addressed in Chapter 7 (Facilities Construction). Although the district has small class sizes, it has several underutilized schools. Underutilized schools require a disproportionate number of staff given student enrollments. For example, each school is allocated one principal, one assistant principal and one guidance counselor position, regardless of student enrollment. As recommended in Chapter 7, the district should continue to implement its long-range plan to increase the utilization of facilities. Increasing the utilization of facilities would give the district the flexibility to make school-based staffing decisions based on the needs of each school's student population.

During the course of our review we also observed that there is frequent change in the leadership of some district schools. For example, one district high school has had four different principals in the last four years, and the other two have had three different principals over the same period. While there may be legitimate reasons for these personnel changes, leadership continuity has implications for areas such as teacher development and evaluation, curriculum oversight, and implementing district policies related to attendance, behavior and instructional materials. The district should consider these issues as it makes future staffing decisions.

## **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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. According to school staff, the district provides sufficient textbooks to students, and teachers have input into the selection of texts. The district also has an inventory system for maintaining information about the location of textbooks. However, the district could improve its operations in two ways. First, the district needs to complete its plan for upgrading textbooks to comply with state requirements. It has completed

upgrading reading and literature textbooks as part of a phased-in plan, and will be on the current adoption cycle when math textbooks are upgraded.

**We recommend that the district complete its plan for upgrading instructional materials by ensuring that math textbooks are replaced during the next adoption cycle. Thereafter, it should continue the practice of buying state-adopted curriculum materials for all core subjects on a regular cycle.**

Second, the district needs to improve school accountability for textbooks. Schools do not consistently follow district procedures for inventorying textbooks, and there is no mechanism to hold schools accountable for the textbooks assigned to them. Thus, the district is not maintaining sufficient oversight to know if there is a problem with lost and damaged textbooks.

**We recommend that the district improve its accountability system for textbooks by ensuring that school administrators understand and follow established inventory procedures. This can be accomplished by providing additional training and using the personnel evaluation process to monitor compliance with policies.**

### **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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. Teachers report that school library/media centers generally have sufficient materials to support instruction. In addition, the age of the district's library/media collection compares favorably to state averages. However, due to staffing constraints, most school media centers are not consistently open during school hours. The district could improve its operations by implementing the recommendation below.

**We recommend that the district improve student access to libraries and media centers by ensuring that facilities are open during all school hours. This could be accomplished through staff assignments, or by using volunteers. The district should also continue to seek grant funds to enable schools to provide library/media center hours that extend beyond the regular school day.**

### **Best Practice 11: Not Using**

#### **The district does not utilize 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

As described in Chapter 5 (Administrative and Instructional Technology), the Gadsden County School District has placed a wide variety of technology resources throughout the district. All schools have computer labs to assist with instruction, and most classrooms have Internet access. While the district uses instructional technology to assess and remediate students who perform poorly on standardized tests, it does not meet standards for this best practice because students do not regularly use technology in school and for class assignments. As a result, students do not have sufficient opportunity to develop skills needed for postsecondary education and employment.

One reason district schools do not adequately utilize instructional technology in the classroom is that, according to some teachers and district administrators, teachers do not have sufficient training to use the full capabilities of available software. However, the instructional technology weakness that prevents the district from meeting standards for this best practice is that the district has difficulty maintaining its technology infrastructure. Action Plan 5-2, in Chapter 5 of this report, provides steps for maintaining the district's technology infrastructure—a step that is a prerequisite for meeting best practice standards for the use of instructional technology.

### **Best Practice 12: Not Using**

**The district does not provide 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 nonacademic 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.

Support services are particularly important in Gadsden County due to the low academic performance of district students coupled with high rates of student disciplinary actions. Data related to these issues was presented earlier in this chapter in Exhibits 4-3 and 4-5. Also, as shown in Exhibit 4-7, below, the district has a higher than average rate of absenteeism. These conditions are symptoms of a high level of need for nonacademic services to support student learning.

#### **Exhibit 4-7 In Gadsden County, the Percentage of Students Absent 21 or More Days Exceeds the State Average**

Type of School	Percentage of Students Absent over 21 Days	
	Gadsden County	State Averages
Elementary Schools	7.9%	6.0%
Middle Schools	19.8%	11.4%
High Schools	19%	15.1%

Source: Florida Department of Education data for 2001-02 school year.

The Gadsden County School District is making progress in one student support services area. In collaboration with the county health department, it has made part-time health services available in most district schools. The district and county health department are planning to provide a more comprehensive level of service for the 2003-04 school year.

However, although it provides some health and other student support services, the Gadsden County School District does not meet standards for this best practice for three reasons. First, the district does not address student support concerns when engaging in district-level planning and evaluation processes and, as discussed earlier in this chapter, does not use data related to issues such as student absenteeism and discipline problems to guide decision making about education programs. Also, the district does not have a student support services plan. Such a plan would provide a framework for identifying and addressing the support service needs of district students, including the resources required to meet student needs in this area.

Second, the district does not adequately cover all of the basic student support services functions. As shown in Exhibit 4-8, Gadsden school psychologists primarily assess if students qualify for exceptional student education programs. The district could expand this role to address problems of student behavior and low academic performance by using psychologists to help schools develop interventions for behavioral problems and successful learning strategies. Social work services in the Gadsden County School District are also limited. Social workers typically serve as the link between the school, the home and the broader community. They also provide leadership in addressing attendance and truancy concerns. In the Gadsden County School District, which experiences a high rate of absenteeism and an associated high dropout rate, this function is not sufficiently defined.<sup>23</sup> The district's single social worker only serves the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program and conducts pre-kindergarten transition assessments.

On the other hand, district guidance counselors are given more than the usual amount of tasks, which affects their ability to adequately address student needs. In addition to their other assigned responsibilities, guidance counselors handle attendance issues as time allows, link community resources with student needs, and spend a significant amount of time coordinating child study teams to assess student needs and devise interventions to address those needs.<sup>24</sup> Given district needs, OPPAGA believes that the way student support services are handled raises concerns about a lack of focus and coordination of efforts, as well as sufficient oversight by qualified and certified professionals.

The third reason the district does not meet best practice standards for student support services is that there is not adequate district-level oversight of programs and services. For example, district staff do not monitor the use of child study teams to ensure that they are used appropriately, or to ensure that they effectively link student needs with programs to address those needs.

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<sup>23</sup> Gadsden County recently (March 2003) established a truancy court, and a visiting teacher position is assigned as an intervention specialist to work with truant children. However, schools have little contact with the visiting teacher, who receives referrals primarily from the community or other agencies.

<sup>24</sup> Guidance counselors are responsible for testing, career counseling, individual and group counseling, and coordinating child study teams. Parent liaisons, which may be full-time or part-time positions, focus on attendance and parent involvement. They are also assigned to other tasks such as hall and media center monitoring, and clerical support.

**Exhibit 4-8  
The Gadsden County School District Does Not Adequately Cover  
All of the Basic Student Support Services Functions**

Student Support Service Function	Best Practice	Gadsden County School District Practice
<b>Health Services</b>	Districts often have health services plans that address how health services are delivered to students. School nurses typically play the major role, and provide screening for health factors that affect learning such as vision and hearing; provide medical services and medication administration; and develop and oversee health care plans for students with disabilities or health conditions that may interfere with learning.	The Gadsden County School District does not have a Health Services Plan. The school district and the Gadsden County Health Department collaborate to provide part-time health care services in all district schools. The district plans to expand the initiative for the 2003-04 school year.
<b>School Psychologists</b>	School psychologists assess student needs, develop successful learning strategies for low performing students, and develop interventions for behavioral problems.	As is the case in many districts, school psychologists in Gadsden County have a narrow role. They primarily conduct assessments, upon the recommendation of child study teams, to determine if students are disabled and therefore qualify for exceptional student education programs.
<b>Social Workers</b>	Social workers serve as the link between the school, the home, and the broader community. They typically provide case management for multiple services a student may be receiving; conduct adaptive behavior assessments for students experiencing difficulties; and communicate with parents to ensure regular school attendance as well as involvement in the education of their children. For the 2002-03 school year, Florida's school districts report a social worker to student ratio of 1 to every 2,900 students.	Gadsden County School District, with a student population of over 7,000, employs one certified social worker. The social worker is assigned to the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program and also conducts pre-kindergarten transition assessments. Social work needs of the broader student population are served in three ways. First, a visiting teacher/intervention specialist works with a small number of truant students and is working to establish a truancy court in the district. Second, guidance counselors assume responsibilities more typically handled by social workers, such as intervention regarding attendance problems. Finally, a parent liaison position is allocated to each school. Parent liaisons, who are not certified, but are required to have two years of college, provide parent training and maintain communication with parents regarding absenteeism. They also make home visits, a task more typically conducted by trained social workers. Parent liaisons do not focus exclusively on parent involvement, but are also assigned to other tasks such as hall and media center monitoring, and clerical support.
<b>Guidance Counselors</b>	Guidance counselors have diverse roles that generally include providing academic and career advisement to students; providing individual and group counseling and education programs; coordinating student intervention teams; and providing support and consultation services to school faculty. In Florida, testing takes an increasing amount of the time of guidance counselors.	Like guidance counselors in other districts, those in Gadsden County have diverse roles, with testing taking an increasing amount of time. In addition to the more traditional guidance counselor role, those in Gadsden County also assume social work functions such as monitoring student absences and linking community resources with student needs. Because the majority of district students are low performing and require academic improvement plans (AIPs), guidance counselors spend a significant amount of time coordinating child study teams, which are student intervention teams that assess student needs and devise interventions to address those needs.

Source: OPPAGA.

Action Plan 4-8 includes steps the district can take to improve its approach to providing student support services.

**Action Plan 4-8**

**We recommend that the Gadsden County School District develop a plan for addressing student support service needs.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Establish a district team responsible for developing a student support services plan. Team members should include district, school, and Florida Department of Education employees, as well as community leaders and representatives of state and local children’s service providers.</p> <p>Step 2. Conduct a student support services needs assessment, with a methodology that includes reviewing school climate surveys, reviewing disaggregated non-academic data, surveying or interviewing district and school staff, conducting a task analysis of current student support services employees, comparing Gadsden to peer districts and state averages, and using other appropriate assessment methods.</p> <p>Step 3. With direction from the school board, prioritize the student needs to be addressed. Establish student support services goals, objectives and strategies. Assign specific staff with the responsibility of implementing strategies. Devise a system for monitoring progress, and annually report results to the school board.</p> <p>Step 4. Incorporate student support services needs into all district planning and evaluation processes, such as the district strategic plan, school improvement plans, and principal and employee annual appraisals.</p> <p>Step 5. Identify potential resources that could be used to expand services to meet student needs, such as procuring new grant funds, re-training and/or re-assigning existing personnel, collaborating with social work programs of regional higher education institutions, and increasing Medicaid reimbursement for services.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Deputy superintendent of Schools and Instruction; district education program directors; principals, school advisory councils.
Time Frame	2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter

# 5 Administrative and Instructional Technology

## *Summary*

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The Gadsden County School District is using six of the nine administrative and instructional technology best practices. The district acquires technology in a cost-effective manner and provides professional development training. The district also has written policies that apply safe and appropriate use of technology and provides timely technical support. The district also follows generally accepted data processing practices and meets the information needs of administrative and instructional personnel. To use the remaining best practices, the district should improve and expand its technology plan, provide a more dependable infrastructure that maximizes network and Internet access and performance, and use technology to improve communication.

## *Background*

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Administrative and instructional 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 administrative and instructional technology resources in the Gadsden County School District currently serve nine elementary schools (including one charter school and one magnet school), two middle schools, two high schools, two combination middle and high schools, the district office, one alternative school, and one adult-vocational education center.<sup>1</sup> The district has provided a wide variety of technology resources throughout the district and established infrastructure to support networking and telecommunications.

Computer and audio-visual equipment, projection systems, televisions, and digital cameras are available to employees at every school. The district has automated each media center and set up production studios in most schools for students to broadcast morning announcements. Most schools have T1 connectivity and most classrooms have Internet access. Each classroom has at least one computer connected to the network. Each school uses computer labs to assist with instruction in a variety of ways.

The district provides systems that support administrative functions. The district uses a resource management system, Total Educational Resource Management System (TERMS), to track payroll,

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<sup>1</sup> Beginning School Year 2003-04, James A. Shanks and Havana Northside High Schools will merge into one high school, East Gadsden High School, decreasing the number of high schools by one.

personnel, finance, professional development, and fixed assets.<sup>2</sup> The district also is a participant in the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium (PAEC), which provides staff development.<sup>3</sup>

## **Funding**

For Fiscal Year 2002-03, district technology funds amounted to \$923,636, with \$591,397 budgeted for instructional technology and \$332,239 budgeted for administrative technology.

Over the last three years, the district received state and federal funds for technology from several sources, including Technology Literacy Challenge Funds and Public School Technology Funds.<sup>4,5</sup> During this time period, the Public School Technology Fund was the only technology funding distributed based exclusively on the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students served. However, the United States Department of Education has replaced Technology Literacy Challenge Funds with the Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT) initiative, which will result in additional funds being awarded based on FTE students.<sup>6</sup> For Fiscal Year 2002-03, the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) awarded half of the \$27 million of available federal EETT funds to all Florida districts based on FTE students, of which the Gadsden County School District received \$85,126. FDOE awarded the other half of the funds competitively. The district applied for but was not awarded funds from the competitive portion.

The district is proactive in applying for grants, but its success in receiving grants has both positive and negative consequences. Although the district has been able to purchase a wide variety of technology resources with grant funds, it may have to provide training and technical support, and replace and maintain older technology long after the grant money has run out. Because the district cannot depend on competitive grant awards, it must continually apply for new grants, which is time consuming and not always productive, or use other funding sources to keep its inventory up-to-date.

## **Organizational Structure**

As shown in Exhibit 5-1, the district's organizational structure results in separate responsibility for instructional and administrative technology. Currently, the director of instructional media services is responsible for instructional technology. Her staff includes a technology specialist, a teacher on special assignment for technology training, one repair technician, and an instructional television technician, all of whom are located at the district office and comprise the district technology management team. The district technology management team is responsible for providing instructional technology services to teachers and other instructional school personnel, maintaining and enhancing technology in the district, addressing technology concerns, and providing technical support to schools.

Each school also receives instructional technology support from its own volunteer technology management team, generally consisting of the media specialist, the computer lab proctor, and a teacher who has some experience working with technology. The school technology management teams meet with the district team quarterly to discuss technology issues. The school technology management teams are responsible for addressing immediate instructional technology concerns when time allows. If a school

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<sup>2</sup> Total Educational Resource Management System (TERMS) is a commercially available resource management software package. OPPAGA's disclosure of the product's name should not be construed as an endorsement of the product.

<sup>3</sup> The [Panhandle Area Educational Consortium \(PAEC\)](#) presently has 14 member districts with the Washington County School Board as the district of record.

<sup>4</sup> The Florida Department of Education's Bureau of Educational Technology recommends that districts expend public school technology funds in accordance with the district's educational technology plan. These funds are also referred to as Education Technology Allocation. See [Public School Technology Funds](#) for more information.

<sup>5</sup> Recipients of Technology Literacy Challenge Funds were selected for funding through a competitive process (see [Technology Literacy Challenge Funds](#)). These federal funds are no longer available, having been replaced with other opportunities through the [No Child Left Behind Act – Enhancing Education Through Technology](#).

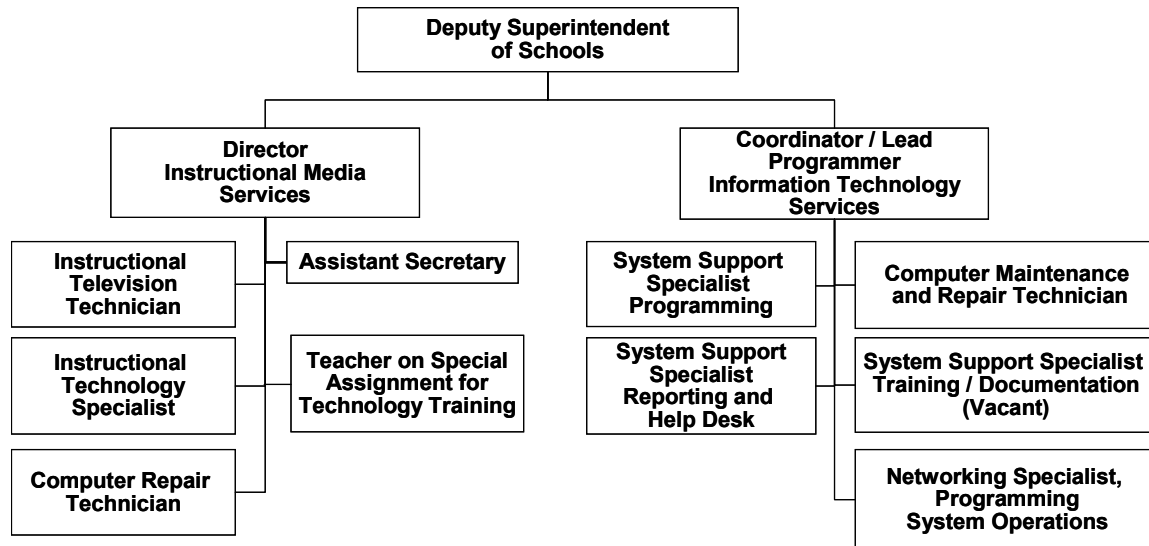
<sup>6</sup> See [Enhancing Education Through Technology \(EETT\)](#) for more information.



technology team cannot solve a problem, it requests help from the district technicians. The district technicians visit each school at least once a month to repair computers and address related issues. The district also contracts for the services of a network technician who is responsible for maintaining and upgrading the district’s network.

The coordinator for information technology services is responsible for administrative technology. Her staff includes two system support specialists, an administrative systems operations network specialist, and a maintenance and repair technician. The Information Technology Services division provides administrative technology services throughout the district, including areas such as payroll, personnel, and fixed assets.

**Exhibit 5-1  
The Gadsden County School District’s Organizational Structure Results in Separate Responsibility for Instructional and Administrative Technology**



Source: Gadsden County School District.

# Conclusion and Recommendations

## Summary of Conclusions for Administrative and Instructional Technology Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
<b>Technology Planning</b>	1. The district has a comprehensive technology plan that provides direction for administrative and instructional technology decision making.	No	5-5
<b>Cost-Effective Technology Acquisition</b>	2. The district acquires technology in a cost-effective manner that will best meet its instructional and administrative needs.	Yes	5-6
<b>Technology Professional Development</b>	3. District and school-based staff receive professional development training for all technologies used in the district.	Yes	5-7
<b>Technical Support</b>	4. The district provides timely and cost-effective technical support that enables educators and district staff to successfully implement technology in the workplace.	Yes	5-8
<b>Infrastructure and Network Communication</b>	5. The district maintains a dependable, standards-based infrastructure employing strategies that cost-effectively maximize network and Internet access and performance.	No	5-9
	6. The district uses technology to improve communication.	No	5-10
	7. The district has written policies that apply safe, ethical, and appropriate use practices that comply with legal and professional standards.	Yes	5-11
<b>Information Management and Delivery</b>	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	5-12
	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	5-13

# TECHNOLOGY PLANNING

## **Best Practice 1: Not Using**

### **The district does not have a comprehensive technology plan that provides direction for administrative and instructional technology decision making.**

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 the administrative needs of decision makers, including administrators, teachers, and non-instructional personnel. An effective planning process identifies the technology needs of users, develops strategies to acquire needed technology in a cost-effective manner, and identifies available funds required for acquisitions. To ensure that all critical needs are identified, the planning process should include a broad range of 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 of the technology plan will vary based on the size of the district, it should include a mission statement and reasonable, measurable goals and objectives that can be accomplished, in most cases, with available resources. The district's budget should reflect the financial commitment to major technology initiatives included in the technology plan. In addition, the planning process should include follow-up procedures 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. District plans should state who is responsible for implementing and updating the technology plan.

The Gadsden County School District has a technology plan. The plan addresses instructional goals in several areas including equitable access in the classroom, district infrastructure, and technical support. The district uses school improvement plans and conducts an annual needs survey to assess the needs of the district.

However, the district is not using this best practice for three reasons. First, the district's technology plan does not include administrative technology. The district's long-term direction in administrative technology may be less focused because the current plan does not address administrative technology goals. By setting goals for administrative technology and including them in the district's technology plan, the district will be in a better position to make sound decisions because the plan would become a roadmap for the district and the public.

Second, the district's technology plan lacks clearly defined and measurable objectives and completion dates. The district should modify the plan to include clearly defined and measurable objectives to better meet the operational needs of schools and the district. This would allow the district to communicate the expectation of all major technology initiatives. The district should also establish and evaluate completion dates and status reports to determine whether plan strategies are effective. By periodically evaluating the initiatives' objectives and completion dates, the district can determine how well it is meeting plan objectives and modify strategies accordingly.

Third, the district's technology plan does not identify resources needed to achieve goals and objectives. The director of instructional media services, who is responsible for implementing and updating the technology plan, completes an annual scope of work document for the instructional technology area. This document is used as a budgeting and planning tool and more closely aligns the tasks to the current budget. Incorporating this document into the technology plan would make it a more effective planning tool.

Action Plan 5-1 includes recommended steps to assist the district in improving its technology plan.

**Action Plan 5-1**

**We recommend that the district develop a more comprehensive technology plan that includes goals for administrative technology, measurable objectives, and information on the time and resources needed to achieve goals and objectives.**

Action Needed	Step 1. Establish and include goals for administrative technology in the district's technology plan. Step 2. Modify the technology plan to include clearly defined and measurable objectives to better meet the operational needs of schools and the district. Include timelines and expected completion dates for the plan's goals and objectives, and state the expectation of major initiatives and the cost associated with each initiative. Link costs to the district budget. Step 3. Evaluate initiatives outlined in the plan and modify strategies accordingly.
Who Is Responsible	Deputy superintendent
Time Frame	July 2004

Although not a factor in determining that the district is not using this best practice, the district would benefit from greater stakeholder input into its technology planning process. The district currently solicits stakeholder input from principals, selected teachers, and other employees. However, it should also invite input from parents, technical advisors, and a broader spectrum of teachers. By doing so, it would gain valuable insight from additional sources, as well as gain advocates who can promote the development of districtwide initiatives.

**We recommend that the district broaden its stakeholder input to include parents, technical advisors, and a broader spectrum of teachers.**

## **COST-EFFECTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACQUISITION**

### **Best Practice 2: Using**

**The district acquires technology in a cost-effective manner that will best meet its instructional and administrative needs.**

Districts can reduce and 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, training, 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. The district assesses the cost of fully implementing and supporting technology acquisitions. The district ensures that its current training specialists and technicians will be able to support the systems that it purchases. The district also considers leasing versus buying equipment and systems.

Although the district uses this best practice, it can enhance its operations by revising its purchasing policy to include the involvement of the assistant superintendent for business and finance in the preliminary stages of the negotiations process to purchase technology resources. As discussed in Chapter 11, Cost Control Systems, there were instances during the 2002-03 fiscal year in which the district directly negotiated technology purchases over \$25,000 and did not obtain specific board approval. Refer to Best Practice 20 in Chapter 11 that includes recommendations to involve the assistant superintendent for business and finance in the preliminary stages of the negotiations process when purchasing technology resources. As an alternative, the board may choose to impose a dollar limit on the direct negotiation method when purchasing technology products.

# TECHNOLOGY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## Best Practice 3: Using

### **District and school-based staff receive professional development training for technologies used in the district.**

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 training and then use this information to focus professional development efforts. To accomplish this, districts must define the level of competency to be mastered, clearly state the training requirements, and develop strategies to provide the needed training. These strategies include traditional classroom, one-on-one, computer lab instruction, 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. The district provides teachers, non-instructional staff, and administrators periodic training in various applications. The district administers training in a number of ways, including traditional classroom, one-on-one, and web-based instruction. After training sessions, the district conducts an assessment to ensure that the teachers received the training that they sought and will be able to integrate that training into classroom curriculum. The district holds an annual weeklong summer institute where selected teachers and other district personnel attend training classes to learn about new programs and to be refreshed on current technology and programs used in the district. The district also conducts an annual survey of teachers and other training attendees that includes questions regarding the technology opportunities provided and desired.

Although the district uses this best practice, there are two ways in which it can improve technology professional development. First, the district should work with principals to more accurately assess teachers' needs for technology professional development to bridge the gap between teachers' training desires and their needs. Currently, the district surveys teachers to determine the areas in which they want technology training. To improve, the district should define skills and level of competency to be mastered, clearly state the training requirements, and develop strategies to provide the needed training. The district should then assist principals in using information in teachers' professional development plans to identify those teachers in greatest need of training. By employing these processes, the district will be able to better target limited training resources and ensure that teachers are increasing their technology usage and integration into the curriculum.

**We recommend that the district work with principals to more accurately assess teachers' needs for technology professional development. The district should define skills and level of competency to be mastered, clearly state the training requirements, and develop strategies to provide the needed training. The district should then assist principals in using information in teachers' professional development plans to identify those teachers in greatest need of training.**

Second, the district also should ensure that employees in the administrative and instructional technology divisions are offered and receive training. Currently, some employees in the Information Technology Services division have not been granted or taken advantage of training opportunities to keep them abreast of current technology and issues.

**We recommend that the district also ensure that employees in the administrative and instructional technology divisions are offered and receive training.**

## TECHNICAL SUPPORT

### Best Practice 4: Using

#### **The district provides timely, effective technical support.**

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 maintained or interrupted. Districts should provide responsive technical support to all users. 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 Gadsden County School District uses this best practice. The district receives technical support from three technicians to provide support to district administrators and schools.<sup>7</sup> To assist the instructional technicians, each school also receives support from its own technology management team, which addresses immediate instructional technology concerns. The district contracts with a technician to maintain, upgrade, and repair the district's network.

Although the district has limited resources in the area of technical support, there are two ways in which the district could improve its operations. The level of satisfaction with technical support varies from school to school, but principals and teachers that were interviewed stated that there is still need for more on-site support in classrooms and computer labs. Most stated that they understood that technical support resources are limited, but that students ultimately suffer when problems are not immediately addressed as they arise. First, to assist the district in providing technical support and teachers requesting it, the district should continue to strongly encourage teachers to follow procedures when reporting computer problems. Currently, teachers are required to report computer problems in a notebook located in each school's library; instructional technicians use the notebooks as a priority list when they visit schools for repairs. There are some instances in which teachers do not properly and timely report problems, thus causing a delay in the repair of computers.

**We recommend that the district continue to strongly encourage teachers to follow procedures when reporting computer problems and requesting technical support.**

Second, the instructional and network technicians should better coordinate efforts by strategically analyzing and comparing support logs and network system tests to ensure that computer problems are not a result or cause of network problems. Currently, instructional technicians keep a log of technical support requests from the school notebooks and the network technician runs system tests on a weekly basis but do not compare information for analysis purposes.

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<sup>7</sup> The district receives administrative support from one technician and instructional technical support from one technician and one instructional technology specialist.

**We recommend that instructional and network technicians better coordinate efforts by strategically analyzing and comparing support logs and network system tests to ensure that computer problems are not a result or cause of network problems.**

## **INFRASTRUCTURE AND NETWORK COMMUNICATION**

### **Best Practice 5: Not Using**

**The district should assess local system operations to maximize network 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 districtwide 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 should protect its network from viruses and have speed and 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 Gadsden County School District has placed a wide variety of technology resources throughout the district and has established infrastructure to support networking and telecommunications. Most schools have T1 connectivity and most classrooms have Internet access. The district has a centralized network, which it monitors and manages from the district office. The district maintains and deploys software districtwide. The district is able to "push" updates to remote servers, from which workstations receive virus signature updates automatically.

However, the district is not using this best practice because network resources are not consistently available to all users, and Internet access and dependability vary from school to school. Some teachers and principals are satisfied with network and Internet operations to the extent they are functioning, but are generally dissatisfied because the network and Internet are not fully operational and consistently available. For example, last year, the Internet was down at Carter Parramore Middle School for about two months and the server was down in one of the computer labs at Stewart Street Elementary School for about six months. Although those particular problems were eventually addressed, some schools continue to experience problems that prevent the Internet and network from being consistently available.

The district needs to assess the cause of system unreliability and timely correct the problems by working with the district network technician. In instances in which the solutions are cost-prohibitive due to budget limitations, the district should address the issues in the technology plan and consider reallocating resources to implement the solutions over the specified period. Action Plan 5-2 includes recommendations to assist the district in improving its infrastructure and network communication.

**Action Plan 5-2**

<b>We recommend that the district assess the cause of system unreliability and develop plans to address the problems.</b>		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Assess the cause of system unreliability and develop recommendations for addressing the problems. Take necessary action if the problems can be fixed with existing resources.
	Step 2.	If funds are not available to immediately address problems with system unreliability, present recommendations to the superintendent and school board.
	Step 3.	Revise the technology plan to implement the recommendations over time.
Who Is Responsible	Deputy superintendent	
Time Frame	July 2004	

**Best Practice 6: Not Using**

**The district has put resources in place to use technology to improve 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, thus saving time and travel. Posting information on websites, such as policies, announcements, and calendars, improves access to important information districtwide 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 Gadsden County School District has the capability to use email and relies on the Florida Information Resource Network (FIRN) to maintain accounts and deliver email messages. All teachers and district staff may set up accounts through FIRN. The district is currently preparing to purchase a mail server that will reinstate inter-district email capabilities. However, the district is not using this best practice because it is not maximizing its technology capabilities to effectively and efficiently communicate. Many teachers, principals, and district personnel do not take advantage of using email to communicate. Some have not set up email accounts through FIRN, while others have set up an account but do not use it. The district primarily uses traditional, less efficient and more costly means, including paper, telephone, and word-of-mouth, to mass communicate with school personnel. To augment these means of communication, the district should also use email to communicate meetings and other directives. It is incumbent upon the district to encourage and increase the use of email in order to more efficiently communicate. To assist in this endeavor, the district should provide personnel with guidelines and training opportunities for email use. Action Plan 5-3 includes recommendations to assist the district in improving its communication through the use of technology.



**Action Plan 5-3**

**We recommend that the district increase the use of email to communicate with its employees and stakeholders.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Draft a policy regarding use of email to communicate with principals, teachers, other district personnel, and parents. The policy should encourage greater use of email when district employees need to disseminate large amounts of information to a wide audience.</p> <p>Step 2. Present the draft policy to the superintendent for approval.</p> <p>Step 3. Develop a training plan for district employees on the use of email and arrange for training in accordance with the plan.</p> <p>Step 4. Compile and disseminate a list of district email addresses and make this information available on the district intranet and Internet websites.</p>
Who is Responsible	Deputy superintendent
Time Frame	July 2004

Although not a factor in determining that the district does not use this best practice, the district also could improve its operations in two ways. First the district should establish a list of minimum requirements that schools should consider when updating their websites. Minimum requirements should include email addresses and phone numbers of all district personnel, and links to other school sites. The district also should consider expanding its website to include links to sites that assist visitors in contacting district personnel and finding other pertinent information. The district should consider expanding its intranet to provide information about professional development opportunities, educational research, and professional organizations. The extent to which these recommendations are implemented can be based on the existing resources and time that the district has to devote to such expansion.

**We recommend that the district establish a list of minimum requirements that schools should consider when updating their websites. The district should also consider expanding its website and intranet to include links that will assist visitors in finding pertinent information.**

Second, the district should further evaluate the implementation and maintenance costs associated with its decision to purchase a mail server. The server may be unnecessary because FIRM provides an adequate email system for the school that has external and inter-district email capabilities. In addition to the purchase price, the installation and management of the system may result in an unnecessary diversion on the district's limited technology resources.

**We recommend that the district further evaluate implementation and maintenance costs of purchasing a mail server.**

**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 copyright infringement has legal ramifications, districts must provide guidelines for employees and others to comply with copyright laws.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. The district receives Internet filtering services from FIRM. The services block websites deemed unacceptable

for students or that are not in the best interest of the district. The district has also established written policies in its *Acceptable Use Policy* and the *Media Handbook*, which provides personnel, teachers, students and parents with written and verbal guidelines describing legal uses of digital materials for instructional and non-instructional use. The written policies in the handbook apply safe, ethical, and appropriate use practices that comply with legal and professional standards. The district requires all personnel, teachers, students and parents to read and sign a terms and conditions form in order to grant them permission to use the Internet within the school district. The district also includes its *Acceptable Use Policy* on its website and is in the process of making the *Media Handbook* available online.

## **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 that they are following generally accepted electronic data processing (EDP) practices and have controls to promote the proper functioning of all information systems.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. The district has controls in place to secure access to systems. The district also ensures that its employees are following generally accepted electronic data processing (EDP) practices. A district system support specialist is responsible for ensuring the reliability and accuracy of all data input at the school level.

However, the district could improve its operations by establishing better documented procedures. Such procedures would allow for a smoother transition when personnel changes occur. When retiring personnel leave, new employees will need updated documentation for reference. Moreover, if data conversion is required or if interfaces are built to streamline administrative procedures, it is critical that developers understand the features of every system in the context of how each is used in order to accurately estimate the cost and benefit of the project. Even though district administrators with many years of experience have well-developed methods for processing data housed in independent systems, many of the procedures are not documented. To reduce risk, the district should ensure that critical procedures are well documented. The district is aware of the importance and is currently drafting procedures.

The district was cited by the Florida Office of the Auditor General for not having a sufficient disaster recovery plan. The district is currently implementing and testing a plan.<sup>8</sup>

**We recommend that the district continue to develop better documented procedures in handbooks and procedure manuals.**

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<sup>8</sup> [Florida Auditor General Report # 03-152](#), issued March 12, 2003, and [Florida Auditor General Report # 02-167](#), issued March 11, 2002.

## **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 the implementation of requested IT products and services.**

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, prioritize, and provide users with a projected timeline when developing reports and applications. Districts should have procedures 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 Gadsden County School District meets the information needs of teachers and administrators in a cost-effective and timely manner and thus is meeting best practice standards. However, the district could improve its information technology services by implementing two strategies. First, the district should implement procedures to gauge user satisfaction with information systems and services. This could be done by devising a survey instrument that allows requestors of information to provide suggestions that could improve services.

**We recommend that the district put procedures in place to gauge user satisfaction with information systems and services.**

The second strategy to enhance the district's ability to provide information technology services is to enable independent systems to interface with one another to reduce the need to enter the same data into multiple databases. The food services and transportation departments use management systems or components independent of the district's primary system, but each has common data elements that are entered into both. Currently, combining the information from these systems can be labor and paper intensive, but this information is necessary to meet the informational needs of district users in planning, budgeting, and general reporting functions. In planning for future replacement or enhancement of these systems, the district should evaluate the possibility of enabling systems to interface with one another to eliminate the need to enter the same data into multiple databases. The district could use the quarterly Panhandle Area Educational Consortium (PAEC) Technology Advisory Council meetings as a forum for analyzing the costs and benefits of enabling systems to interface with one another.

**We recommend that in planning for future replacement or enhancement of technology systems, the district evaluate the possibility of enabling systems to interface with one another to eliminate the need to enter the same data into multiple databases.**

# 6 Personnel Systems and Benefits

## *Summary*

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The Gadsden County School District is using 10 of the 11 personnel systems and benefits best practices. The district is generally managing its human resource activities such as recruiting and hiring, training, and appraising employee performance in an economical and efficient manner. To use the remaining best practice, the district should improve its methods to identify and address issues related to employee turnover.

## *Background*

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The Gadsden County School District employed 1,040 full-time persons during School Year 2001-02, of whom approximately 48% were instructional personnel (see Exhibit 6-1).

The district has assigned responsibility for personnel records, application and hiring processes, personnel orientation, and evaluation procedures and coordination to the assistant superintendent for Human Resources and Staff Development and the director of Personnel. The assistant superintendent has six full-time employees that are dedicated to personnel issues. Other aspects of personnel are managed through other departments as noted below.

- The district's instructional staff development programs are the primary responsibility of the assistant superintendent for Human Resources and Staff Development, while non-instructional staff development programs are the responsibility of the local supervisors at school sites.
- Benefit packages and collective bargaining are the primary responsibility of the district's chief negotiator and the assistant superintendent of Finance and Business Services.
- Workers compensation services fall under the oversight of the assistant superintendent for Business and Finance.

The district does not have a separate human resource budget.

The Gadsden County Classroom Teachers Association (GCCTA) represents the district's teachers in collective bargaining while Gadsden Educational Support Personnel Association (GESPA) represents non-instructional employees. As of October 2002, approximately half of the district's instructional employees were members of the union.

**Exhibit 6-1  
During 2001-02, the Gadsden School District Employed 1,040 Persons**

Categories of Employees		Numbers of Employees
<b>Administrative Employees</b>	District Level	29
	School Level	30
	<b>Total Administrative</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Instructional Employees</b>	Elementary	197
	Secondary	155
	Exceptional Student	65
	Other Teachers	24
	Other Instructional Staff	56
	<b>Total Instructional</b>	<b>497</b>
<b>Non-Instructional Employees</b>	Professional	18
	Non-Professional	466
	<b>Total Non-Instructional</b>	<b>484</b>
<b>Total Employees</b>		<b>1,040</b>

Source: Department of Education.

## Activities of particular interest

### ***Use of safety and investigations coordinator for school safety, workers' compensation issues, and applicant screening.***

The district hired a safety and investigations coordinator at the beginning of the 2001-2002 school year. The safety and investigations coordinator has law enforcement credentials and previously worked in the schools as a school resource officer under the jurisdiction of the local sheriff's department. To enable this employee to retain his arrest authority when he became a full time school board employee, the board commissioned him as a school safety officer (as permitted by s. 1006.12, *Florida Statutes*).

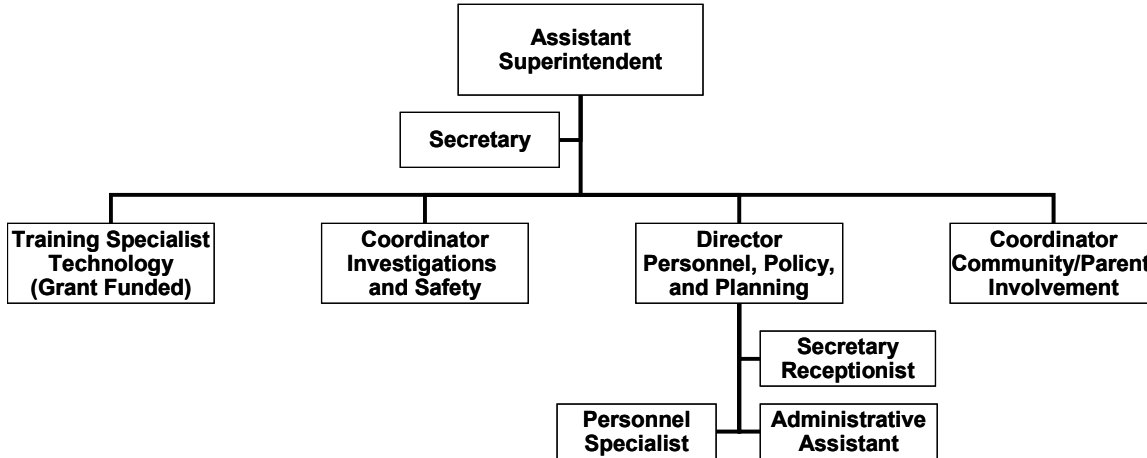
The coordinator's duties include investigating and resolving allegations of misbehavior by district students and employees, performing on-line criminal history background screening of district applicants, performing school safety programs and inspections, working with the district safety committee to conduct school walk-through inspections to determine potential problems, and monitoring worker compensation claims and potential hires to detect problems with a history of claims.

District employees formerly spent large amounts of time trying to fill positions before the start of the year, only to discover later that some of the new hires had a criminal background. Now the safety coordinator helps the district more efficiently weed out applicants with a criminal background. In previous years, the district would hire someone trusting his or her application on face value (pending further background checks). On occasion, a hired person's file would come back from the background check showing some type of criminal record. Since this meant that the person lied on their application, the district had ample grounds to fire the employee. However, firing the employee would result in a position being open shortly after the start of the year, and the district would have to work to fill that position again while still trying to fill positions not yet filled at the start of the year. The applicant screening process now includes asking for fingerprints initially and having applicants fill out a questionnaire regarding past criminal history. The safety coordinator uses a separate computer system to quickly search criminal history.

***Reducing absenteeism by providing payment for sick leave.*** As an incentive for employees to reduce their absenteeism, the district compensates most employees, as defined by s. 1012.61, *Florida Statutes*, for unused sick leave days earned during the current year. The district pays for the sick leave at a rate of 80% of salary. Formerly, the district paid employees for unused sick leave at the time of

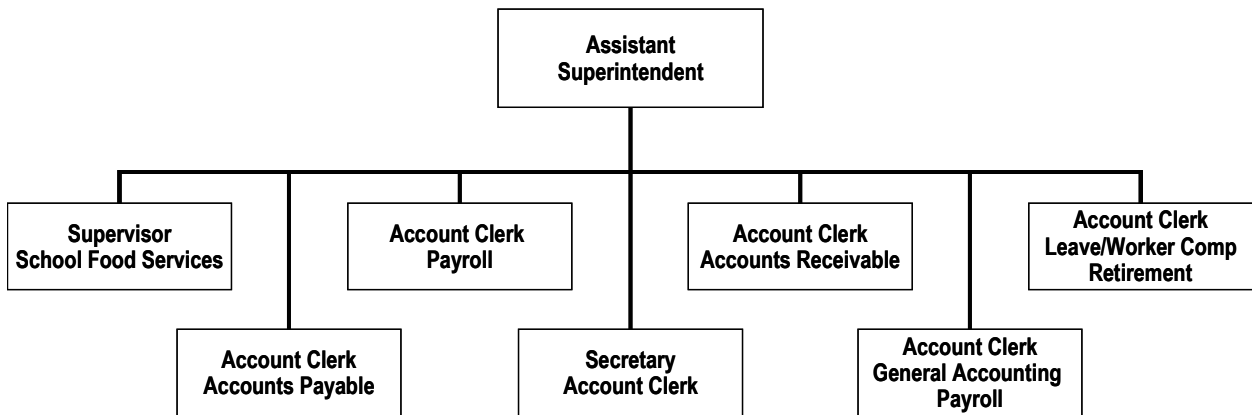
retirement. This practice not only reduces absenteeism, it results in long-term savings for the district because sick leave can be paid for at 80% of the current salary rate rather than 100% of the higher salary rate at the time of retirement.<sup>1</sup>

**Exhibit 6-2  
Human Resources Development and Staff Development**



Source: Gadsden County School District.

**Exhibit 6-3  
Finance and Business Services**



Source: Gadsden County School District.

<sup>1</sup> Salary rates are typically higher at the time of retirement due to salary increases and/or promotions over time.

# Conclusion and Recommendations

## Summary of Conclusions for Personnel Systems and Benefits Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
Human Resource Management	1. The district efficiently and effectively recruits and hires qualified instructional and non-instructional personnel.	Yes	6-5
	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.	No	6-6
	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.	Yes	6-7
	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	6-8
	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	6-9
	6. The district has efficient and cost-effective system for managing absenteeism and the use of substitute teachers and other substitute personnel.	Yes	6-9
	7. The district maintains personnel records in an efficient and readily accessible manner.	Yes	6-10
	8. The district uses cost containment practices for its Workers' Compensation Program.	Yes	6-10
	9. The district uses cost containment practices for its employee benefits programs, including health insurance, dental insurance, life insurance, disability insurance, and retirement.	Yes	6-10
	10. The district's human resource program is managed effectively and efficiently.	Yes	6-10
	11. For classes of employees that are unionized, the district maintains an effective collective bargaining process.	Yes	6-11

# HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

## Best Practice 1: Using

### **The district efficiently and effectively recruits and hires qualified instructional and non-instructional personnel.**

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 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 that 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could improve its operations in three areas. First, the district could enhance its recruiting operations by ensuring that it is using the most effective methods and eliminating methods with limited results. Currently, district employment applications do not include a question regarding where applicants learned about the opening. Instead, to obtain this information the district verbally requests that applicants indicate on the application form where they learned of employment opportunities in the district. This method limits the collection of data to those applicants who actually speak with district employees before submitting their applications. Systematically collecting this information from all applicants would provide more comprehensive information and enable the district to better evaluate recruiting methods.

**We recommend that the district include a question in its employment applications regarding where applicants learned of job opportunities with the district. The district should use this information to target recruiting strategies.**

Second, the district has the potential to increase efficiency by allowing principals to review applications or information on the pool of applicants without traveling to the central district office. Currently, if a principal wants to review applications that have been submitted to the district, the principal must travel to the central office. To enable principals to view applications without leaving the school site, the district would need to update its database and assign someone to enter application information into the system. District employees told us that since applications expire at the end of the year, they would not need to input previously received applications. They would only need to enter applications being received for the upcoming year. They also said that the database is capable of holding this information and little or no financial resources would be expended to program the database to perform this function.

**We recommend that the district establish network capabilities to allow principals to view qualified applications from their school site via computer rather than travel to the central office to review applications each time vacancies occur.**



Third, as discussed in Chapter Four, (Educational Service Delivery) the district needs to improve its recruitment of bilingual teachers and paraprofessionals. Our recommendations to address this issue are discussed in Chapter Four, Best Practice 3.

## **Best Practice 2: Not Using**

**The district has high turnover and could improve its methods for determining the status of the current work environment thereby increasing its ability to address factors that contribute to increased turnover or low employee morale.**

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.

In the past, the Gadsden County School District was able to maintain a fairly stable work force because it had fairly competitive salaries in relation to surrounding districts. At present, higher salaries in surrounding counties and Georgia, as well as a general shortage of teachers statewide, is beginning to have an effect on the district's ability to maintain a stable workforce. The district has limited funds with which to increase teacher salaries. In an effort to address turnover, the Gadsden County School District conducts employee exit interviews, communicates policy or rule changes while allowing for employee input, conducts climate surveys, and monitors employees nearing retirement to prepare for their departure.

However, the district is not using this best practice due to its limited ability to identify and remedy reasons for turnover. According to state exit interview data for instructional employees, the Gadsden County School District has one of the highest rates of turnover in the state, 20.4% in 2002. The state average is 4.9%. To identify and appropriately address turnover, the district must work to determine whether reasons other than salary levels are contributing to its high turnover rate. Identifying and addressing secondary causes of turnover becomes even more important because the district may not be able to fully address the salary levels. To obtain better data on these secondary causes, the district needs to obtain more detailed information from the exit interview process and expand the use of the teacher climate survey tool.

Although district officials stated that some exit interviews informally reveal further information as to why employees leave, the current interview form does not capture this information. Current exit interviews allow a departing employee the opportunity to use checkboxes on a form to indicate the reason for separation from the teaching position. Possible responses include voluntary resignation; involuntary termination due to performance, probationary period, or reduction in force; or a brief blank space to list other reasons. The exit interview form also requests further information about the employee's voluntary separation such as whether the separation is due to inadequate salary, dissatisfaction with supervisor, or personal reasons, and requests information regarding the employee's future employment. The district could modify the exit interview form to capture more detailed information to use in determining how to decrease employee turnover.

District personnel managers also should use the climate survey, in conjunction with exit interview data, to identify areas that may indicate low employee satisfaction or other issues that may lead to turnover. Traditionally, schools use climate surveys in the development of school improvement plans. However,

the district should expand the use of this tool to better assess employee needs. The district could then compare turnover rates for particular schools to climate survey data to see if there are school-based factors that may be contributing to turnover.

Action Plan 6-1 contains steps to help the district improve its ability to identify and remedy reasons for turnover.

**Action Plan 6-1**

**In order to better address retention rates, we recommend that the district use exit interviews and climate surveys to better identify and remedy reasons for turnover.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. The district should continue to use the exit interview form and procedures to collect comprehensive information on reasons for separation from employment. The district should include in the employee handbook a summary of available options to employees considering terminating their employment with the district. In addition, the district should develop a form letter to be given to departing teachers that expresses available options they have for a supplemental written portion or face-to-face exit interview with district staff directly to communicate reasons for leaving.</p> <p>Step 2. The assistant superintendent of Personnel and Human Resources, director of K-12 Instruction, and director of Personnel should review and provide suggestions as to how the climate survey questions could be modified or enhanced in an effort to make sure the survey addresses needs or issues concerning all employees.</p> <p>Step 3. The assistant superintendent of Personnel and Human Resources, director of K-12 Instruction, and director of Personnel should employ data driven decision making by using exit interview data and climate survey results in an attempt to identify patterns or reasons for departure from the district and individual schools.</p> <p>Step 4. The assistant superintendent of Personnel and Human Resources, director of K-12 Instruction, director of Personnel should use the information gathered from exit interviews and climate surveys to make recommendations to the superintendent and the board regarding how to reduce turnover.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Assistant superintendent of Personnel and Human Resources, director of K-12 Instruction, director of Personnel
Time Frame	July 2004

**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 non-instructional, instructional, and administrative employees.**

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 non-instructional 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, there are two areas in which the district could enhance its professional development operations to ensure employees are meeting the expectations of the school and the district. First, the district could improve the linkage between the identification of performance deficiencies by principals and supervisors and the delivery of training opportunities so that employees can address their deficiencies. Although

principals and supervisors identify instructional employee development needs in performance appraisals and the district provides training to address these needs, the district does not have a mechanism to ensure that employees with performance deficiencies are matched with the appropriate training.

**We recommend that the district enforce and monitor the use of the performance appraisal mechanism to ensure that teachers receive training to address employee development needs identified in the performance appraisal process. Principals should identify any training needs during the performance appraisal and stipulate in the employee's professional development plan that the training be received during the coming year. If training is not sufficiently addressed, the principal should indicate this on the employee's next performance appraisal by giving a lower rating in order to provide some enforcement to the identified training need in the professional development plan. We further recommend that district staff monitor principal's use of the appraisal process to ensure training identified in a teacher's professional development plan is tied to their next appraisal. If principals do not effectively use the appraisal process to enforce identified training needs, it should be reflected in the principal's evaluation performed by district staff.**

Second, the district does not have tools in place to provide general assurance that non-instructional personnel have received appropriate training. The district delegates responsibility for training to the site level (schools) for non-instructional employees. In other cases, training is not adequately tracked. For example, the transportation department is responsible for the training of bus drivers. While the district does some tracking of instructional training received, this tracking is limited. Regardless of whether the district has assigned departments the responsibility to assess non-instructional training needs and to provide the needed training, the district should have an effective process to ensure that the needed training is provided for all non-instructional employees.

**We recommend that the district develop a reliable method to ensure non-instructional training is received. This could be accomplished through periodic training reports or other similar accountability mechanisms.**

## **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 non-instructional 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 non-administrative personnel and from parents.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could enhance its evaluation system by ensuring that administrators' performance assessments include appropriate input. District administrators are made aware that non-administrative personnel and parent input could be used to assess the performance of administrators. However, the district does not have documentation that this input is being used in the preparation of evaluations and district officials acknowledge that they cannot guarantee that the input is being used.

**We recommend that the district ensure that its policy to incorporate parental and non-administrator feedback in the administrator evaluation process is followed.**

### **Best Practice 5: Using**

**The district has a policy in place for dealing with employees who repeatedly fail to meet the district's performance expectations or whose behavior or job performance is potentially harmful to students, but could take steps to improve enforcement of the policy to insure poor performers are identified and properly dealt with.**

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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. The district hired a safety and investigations coordinator at the beginning of the 2001-02 school year whose duties include investigations and resolutions of allegations of improper behavior by district students and employees. The district has policy, procedures, and contract language regarding drug testing of all employees. In instances where poor performing employees are identified, district administrators have stated that they are available to assist school administrators by providing training, coaching, and assistance in due process.

Although the district has appropriate employee performance policies in place, the district could improve its use of this best practice by ensuring that those policies are followed and that the transfer of employees with performance problems is minimized. This could be achieved by better tracking of summary performance appraisal data for employees. The district should monitor overall appraisal results to make better data-driven decisions and to ensure that poorly performing employees are not transferred from one site to another without performance deficiencies being documented.

**We recommend that the district develop a review process to ensure that principals identify poor performance among its employees and that data related to the performance appraisals be reviewed in considering decisions to rehire, retain, and transfer employees. Supervisors should receive continuing guidance as to the district's expectation's regarding poorly performing employees and training with the skills to deal effectively with poor performance.**

### **Best Practice 6: Using**

**The district has 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 non-instructional 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **Best Practice 7: Using**

#### **The district maintains personnel records in an efficient and readily accessible manner.**

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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **Best Practice 8: Using**

#### **The district uses cost containment practices for its workers' compensation program.**

When left uncontrolled, worker's 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 correction 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **Best Practice 9: Using**

#### **The district uses cost containment practices for its employee benefits programs, including health insurance, dental insurance, life insurance, disability insurance, and retirement.**

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.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **Best Practice 10: Using**

#### **The district's human resource program is managed effectively and efficiently.**

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 identify the expected outcomes of the program. The district should conduct formal and/or informal reviews of the 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **Best Practice 11: Using**

**For classes of employees that are unionized, the district maintains an effective collective bargaining process.**

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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

# 7 Facilities Construction

## *Summary*

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The Gadsden County School District is using 20 of the 23 applicable facilities construction best practices.<sup>1</sup> The district is effectively using long-range planning and state money for new construction to manage declining enrollment and funding, and to help solve its urgent facilities maintenance problems. To use the remaining best practices, the district should improve its planning processes by setting budgetary plans and priorities in its five-year facilities work plan, and establish mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its construction projects.

## *Background*

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The Gadsden County School District has a low utilization rate of its school facilities. The district is experiencing a decline in school enrollment. To address problems due to aging facilities and underutilization, the district has established a long-range facilities plan to build new schools, close down schools that are underutilized and/or in poor condition, and consolidate students into newer and fewer schools. As a result, most of the district's capital outlay funding is currently devoted to new construction. The district facilities director manages new construction and major maintenance projects using contracted services.

### **Facilities utilization**

As shown in Exhibits 7-1 and 7-2, the district utilizes 62% of its school capacity. The district has a 2002-03 capital outlay FTE (full-time equivalent) student count of 6,440 and the capacity for 10,394 students across 15 schools.<sup>2</sup> The district's utilization rate varies widely across schools. For example, as shown in Exhibit 7-1, the utilization rate is 37% of capacity at Chattahoochee High School and 102% at Quincy Educational Academy.

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<sup>1</sup> The construction best practice relating to compliance with the Florida Building Code did not apply to the district during our fieldwork.

<sup>2</sup> Excludes the Midway Magnet School and the Crossroads Academy Charter School.

**Exhibit 7-1  
Utilization of School Capacity Ranges from 37% to 102% and Averages 62%**

School	Total Satisfactory Student Stations	Satisfactory Permanent Student Stations	Full Capacity	Capital Outlay FTE <sup>1</sup>	Utilization of Capacity
Chattahoochee Senior High	651	651	585	214	37%
James A. Shanks Senior High <sup>2</sup>	1,944	1,613	1,846	903	49%
Havana Elementary	1,051	822	1,051	581	55%
Havana Northside Senior High	678	528	542	300	55%
Saint Johns Elementary	512	490	512	294	57%
Gretna Elementary	534	490	534	322	60%
New Havana Middle	661	661	594	366	62%
Stewart Street Elementary	859	750	859	550	64%
Chattahoochee Elementary	584	498	584	389	67%
Carter-Parramore Middle	1,148	1,047	1,033	748	72%
George W. Munroe Elementary	1,021	811	1,021	775	76%
Greensboro Elementary	574	463	574	449	78%
Greensboro Senior High	614	522	552	440	80%
Quincy Educational Academy	107	89	107	109	102%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10,938</b>	<b>9,435</b>	<b>10,394</b>	<b>6,440</b>	<b>62%</b>

<sup>1</sup> Capital Outlay FTE is calculated by the Florida Department of Education by averaging the unweighted full-time equivalent student membership for the second and third surveys of student counts and comparing the results on a school-by-school basis with the Florida Inventory of School Houses.

<sup>2</sup> Gadsden's facilities inventory combines data for Shanks High School and the Gadsden Technical Institute. At the time Gadsden Technical Institute was built in 1972, it was included under the same facility number as Shanks High School, and this practice has continued to the present. Therefore, information on Gadsden Vocational Institute is included with senior high school data in some data categories.

Source: Florida Inventory of School Houses School Year 2002-03.

**Exhibit 7-2  
The Full Capacity of District Facilities Is 10,394 Students**

Description	Number of Schools <sup>1</sup>	Total Satisfactory Student Stations	Satisfactory Permanent Student Stations	Capacity of Permanent Facilities	Full Capacity	Capital Outlay FTE
Elementary	7 <sup>1</sup>	5,135	4,324	4,324	5,135	3,360
Middle	2	1,809	1,708	1,536	1,627	1,114
Senior High	2	2,622	2,141	1,954	2,388	1,203
Exceptional Student	1	107	89	89	107	109
Combination <sup>2</sup>	2	1,265	1,173	1,054	1,137	654
Vocational Technical <sup>3</sup>	1					
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10,938</b>	<b>9,435</b>	<b>8,957</b>	<b>10,394</b>	<b>6,440</b>

<sup>1</sup> Excludes the Midway Magnet School and the Crossroads Academy Charter School.

<sup>2</sup> Chattahoochee High School and Greensboro High School include grades 7 through 12.

<sup>3</sup> Gadsden's facilities inventory combines data for Shanks High School and Gadsden Vocational Institute.

Source: Florida Inventory of School Houses School Year 2002-03.



## Facilities inventory

The district has 15 school facilities in current use that are listed in the district’s inventory with the Florida Department of Education, as well as a magnet school and a charter school that are not listed.<sup>3</sup> As shown in Exhibit 7-3, the 15 schools in the district’s inventory have over one million net square feet of space.

The district’s schools are aging and have a number of condition problems.<sup>4</sup> Nearly all of the district’s schools were built prior to 1973 (see Exhibit 7-3).<sup>5</sup> The district has only one school in its inventory that was newly constructed after the early 1970s. Havana Middle School was built in 1992. The district also has one school, Greensboro High School, which was substantially rebuilt after a fire in 1992.

**Exhibit 7-3  
Gadsden County School District Has Only One School Initially Constructed After 1972**

School	Year Initially Constructed	Permanent Net Square Feet	Capital Outlay Classification <sup>1</sup>
Greensboro Senior High	1889	68,832	C-1
Chattahoochee Senior High	1913	80,835	C-3
Quincy Educational Academy	1919	84,710	C-3
Greensboro Elementary	1923	48,663	C-3
Gretna Elementary	1924	50,285	C-3
Havana Elementary	1931	71,930	C-1
Saint Johns Elementary	1935	46,055	C-3
Carter-Parramore Middle	1952	96,445	C-1
George W. Munroe Elementary	1955	72,832	C-1
Stewart Street Elementary	1958	61,500	C-1
Havana Northside Senior High	1962	63,223	C-3
James A. Shanks Senior High	1963	127,604	C-1
Chattahoochee Elementary	1970	54,971	C-1
Gadsden Technical Institute	1972	50,625	C-1
Havana Middle	1992	101,434	C-1
<b>Total Permanent Net Square Feet</b>		<b>1,079,944</b>	

<sup>1</sup> The Capital Outlay Classification is based on the most recent Education Plant Survey, conducted in 2000. A C-1 facility is recommended for continued use. A C-3 facility is unsatisfactory in one or more major aspects. Generally, this includes (1) inadequate site and/or unsatisfactory building(s), (2) declining or static enrollment to a level indicating that the needs of students can be better and more economically served at other educational plants, or (3) abandoned educational plants not currently housing students.

Source: Florida Inventory of School Houses, Fiscal Year 2002-03, and the district Education Plant Survey as of October 2000.

As also shown in Exhibit 7-3, six of the district’s schools have a fixed capital outlay classification of C-3, meaning that the facility is unsatisfactory in one or more major aspects. This rating may include an inadequate site, unsatisfactory buildings, or declining or static enrollment to a level indicating that the needs of students can be better and more economically served at other educational plants.

<sup>3</sup> The FDOE Florida Inventory of School Houses does not usually include charter schools. The district’s Midway Magnet School consists of rented relocatables and serves grades K to 3. As discussed under Best Practice 16, the district has not yet listed this school in the district facilities inventory.

<sup>4</sup> See also Chapter 8, Facilities Maintenance.

<sup>5</sup> Although Florida Inventory of School House data shows that Gadsden has schools dating back to 1889, this data should be considered with an understanding that these dates do not show when major renovations occurred since initial acquisition. For example, although land for the Greensboro High School was acquired in 1889, the school burned and was substantially rebuilt in 1993-94. According to the Florida Department of Education’s FISH manual, school districts are not supposed to update the date of initial construction when schools are renovated or undergo restoration.

## Capital budget

Gadsden County School District is currently in the process of building its first new school in approximately 10 years. The district is building a new high school on the east side of Quincy (currently named East Gadsden High School). The school is scheduled for completion in time for the 2003-04 school year. The district plans to move students from Shanks High School and Havana Northside High School into the new facility and abandon Havana Northside High School at that time.

The new East Gadsden High School is part of a long-range plan for building new facilities and consolidating students. Over time, enrollment in Gadsden schools has decreased, and enrollment is expected to continue this downward trend (see Exhibit 7-4). To address problems with aging facilities and a decreasing student population, the district has developed a long-range plan that includes building two new high schools and a new elementary school. The plan calls for consolidating students into new schools and rearranging the current use of facilities so that six school sites can be closed and four can be converted to other uses.<sup>6</sup> The schools selected for closure either have capital outlay classifications of C-3 (unsatisfactory in one or more major aspects) in the most recent district educational plant survey, or consist entirely of relocatable classrooms. By closing schools that are underutilized, in poor condition or both, and replacing these schools with fewer and newer facilities, the district will lower its school operations and maintenance costs. The district also should save on other costs such as salaries and benefits for principals, teachers, and support personnel. The district's long-range plan is summarized in Exhibit 7-5.

### Exhibit 7-4 Gadsden County School District Is Experiencing a Downtrend Trend in the Number of Students

School Year	Capital Outlay FTEs
<b>Actual</b>	
1997-98	7,649
1998-99	7,386
1999-00	6,969
2000-01	6,436
2001-02	6,440
<b>Projections</b>	
2002-03	6,240
2003-04	6,017
2004-05	5,826
2005-06	5,726
2006-07	5,655
2007-08	5,619
2008-09	5,585
2009-10	5,549
2010-11	5,515
2011-12	5,493

Source: Florida Department of Education, Capital Outlay FTE forecast as of July 2002.

<sup>6</sup> The school sites that would be closed are Havana Northside High School, Chattahoochee High School, Greensboro Elementary, Gretna Elementary, St. Johns Elementary, and Midway Magnet School (presently consisting entirely of relocatable classrooms). Shanks High School would be converted to accommodate Carter Parramore Middle School. Carter Parramore Middle School would be converted to housing administrative personnel and alternative programs. Greensboro High School would be converted to accommodate Greensboro Elementary School. Midway Magnet School would be moved to the Quincy Educational Academy campus, with the relocatables from that school used elsewhere.

The district’s plan is contingent on obtaining state special facilities funding to pay for the new schools, as it did for the East Gadsden High School currently under construction. The district has one more year in the three-year funding arrangement required by state special facilities funding to pay for East Gadsden High School.<sup>7</sup> Once the project payback is completed, the district plans to seek state special facilities funding to build a high school on the west side of the county (West Gadsden High School). Once this second high school is paid off, the district plans to seek special facility funding to build a new elementary school. Due to the statutory requirements for special facilities funding, the district must commit most of its millage for three years to pay toward each facility built with special facilities funding. As a result, the district will likely have limited fixed capital outlay funds for the next seven years (one year remaining for the East Gadsden High School, and then three years each for the west side high school and the elementary school).<sup>8</sup>

**Exhibit 7-5**

**Implementing Gadsden County School District’s Long-range Facilities Plan Will Result in Building Three New Schools and Closing Six Older Schools**

Gadsden County School District Long-range Facilities Plan
Using existing funding, remodel enough of Quincy Educational Academy to house the Midway Magnet School.
Build a large high school on the eastern side of the district to replace Shanks High School and Havana Northside High School. Upon completion, abandon Havana Northside High School.
Once Shanks High School has moved into the new facility, remodel the old Shanks building to house Carter Parramore Middle School students.
Using existing funding, remodel Carter Parramore Middle School to house the district’s Alternative Education Program, Head Start Administration Section, Bilingual Administrative Sections, and ROTC Headquarters.
Build a large high school on the western side of the district to consolidate Greensboro High School and Chattahoochee High School. Upon completion, abandon Chattahoochee High School.
Once the new west side facility is completed, convert Greensboro High School to accommodate Greensboro Elementary School. Upon completion, abandon Greensboro Elementary School.
Build a new elementary school to consolidate Gretna Elementary and St. Johns Elementary School. Upon completion, abandon both Gretna Elementary and St. Johns Elementary.

Source: Gadsden County School District.

Because the district is currently devoting most of its fixed capital outlay funding to new construction, its five-year capital outlay plan contains few renovation and remodeling projects. As shown in Exhibit 7-6, most of the district’s construction budget for the next five years is planned for new school construction. The district also has approximately \$2.4 million remaining in Classroom First capital outlay funding, and the school board is in the process of deciding how the money will be spent.

<sup>7</sup> As specified by s. 1013.64, *F.S.*, the Florida Department of Education has established an account called the Special Facility Construction Account. The fund is used to provide funding to school districts with urgent construction needs and a lack of sufficient resources to meet these needs with currently authorized capital outlay revenue. School districts obtaining these funds must be assessing the full statutory authorization of 2.0 mills of their millage against their nonexempt assessed property value, and pay 1.5 mills of this amount toward the project for a period of three years. The Gadsden County School District has levied the maximum of 2.0 mills for capital outlay, which leaves one-half mill to fund other capital outlay needs over the three-year period.

<sup>8</sup> After paying 1.5 mills toward each special facilities funding project, the district will have one-half mills for other capital outlay projects (approximately \$400,000 annually) plus whatever funds the state provides to the district that can be used for maintenance and repairs. The district is currently spending some of its one-half mill for purchase of school buses and rental of relocatables. In recent years, the district has been able to budget approximately \$1.6 million annually for the maintenance department.

**Exhibit 7-6  
Most of the District's Construction Budget  
for the Next Five Years Is Devoted to New School Construction**

<b>Allocated Funds <sup>1</sup></b>							
<b>Project</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>2002-03 Budget</b>	<b>2003-04 Projected Cost</b>	<b>2004-05 Projected Cost</b>	<b>2005-06 Projected Cost</b>	<b>2006-07 Projected Cost</b>	<b>Five-Year Total</b>
HVAC/ Roof repair	Carter Parramore Middle	\$66,000					\$66,000
Room partition and restroom remodeling	Chattahoochee Elementary St. Johns Elementary George Munroe Elementary Havana Elementary	\$380,000					\$380,000
Fire alarm renovation	Shanks High Stewart Street Elementary Chattahoochee Elementary	\$50,000					\$50,000
Relocatable rent <sup>2</sup>	District-wide	\$148,520	\$130,000	\$130,000	\$130,000	\$130,000	\$668,520
School buses <sup>2</sup>	District-wide	\$274,159	\$426,677	\$800,000	\$800,000	\$800,000	\$3,100,836
New construction	East Gadsden High	\$21,239,400	\$1,234,338				\$22,473,738
<b>Totals</b>		<b>\$22,158,079</b>	<b>\$1,791,015</b>	<b>\$930,000</b>	<b>\$930,000</b>	<b>\$930,000</b>	<b>\$26,739,094</b>

<sup>1</sup> Excludes \$2.4 million in unallocated Classroom First funding.

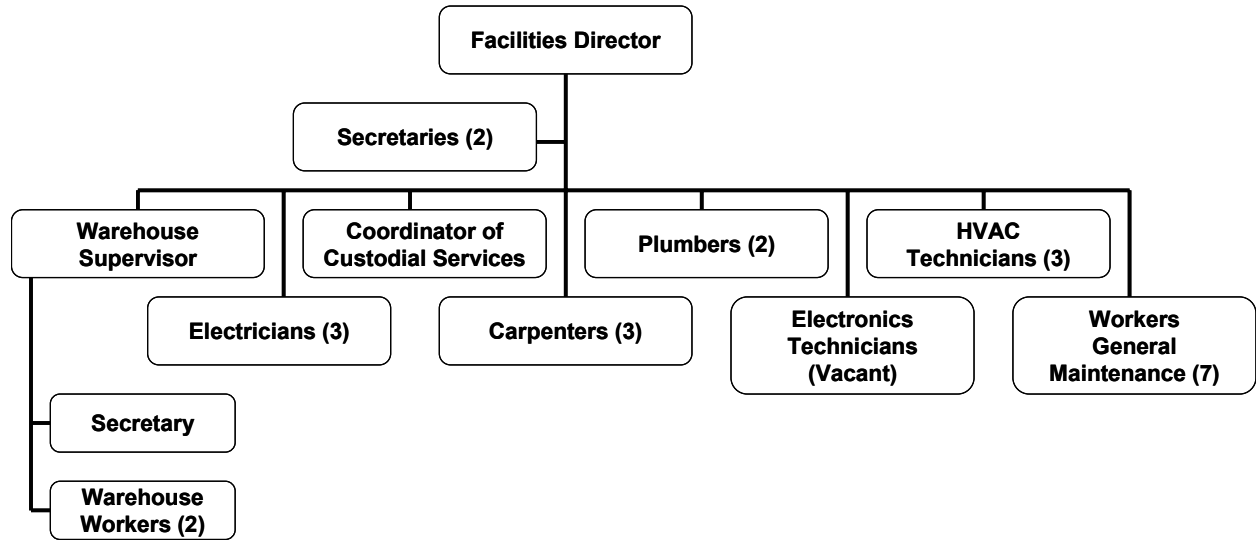
<sup>2</sup> The district is using a portion of its 2.0 mill funding to pay for these items.

Source: Five-year capital outlay projection and documents provided by Gadsden County School District administrators.

**Organization and management**

The district's facilities director is the primary administrator in charge of new construction, remodeling, and renovation projects. The district contracts for these services and uses its skilled trade maintenance employees for day-to-day repairs and other maintenance work (see Exhibit 7-7). For example, the district hired an architect and a construction project manager to design and build East Gadsden High School. The facilities director is in charge of project oversight for the district. He is a certified building code inspector. The architect also assists with project oversight. The facilities director meets with the architect and construction manager, as well as others involved in the building process, once a week to discuss progress, signs all change orders, and reports to the school board on the progress of construction.

**Exhibit 7-7**  
**The Gadsden County School District's Maintenance Department**  
**Includes Positions in Various Skilled Trades, Clerical, Supervisory,**  
**and Maintenance and Custodial Support Positions**



Source: Gadsden County School District, effective September 2002.

# Conclusion and Recommendations

## Summary of Conclusions for Facilities Construction Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
<b>Construction Planning</b>	1. The district has effective long-range planning processes.	Yes	7-10
	2. When developing the annual five-year facilities work plan the district evaluates alternatives to minimize the need for new construction.	Yes	7-11
	3. The five-year facilities work plan establishes budgetary plans and priorities.	No	7-11
	4. The school board ensures responsiveness to the community through open communication about the construction program and the five-year facilities work plan.	Yes	7-12
	5. The district has an effective site selection process based on expected growth patterns.	Yes	7-12
	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	7-13
<b>Construction Funding</b>	7. Funds collected for school projects were raised appropriately.	Yes	7-13
	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	7-14
<b>Construction Design</b>	9. The district develops thorough descriptions and educational specifications for each construction project.	Yes	7-14
	10. The architectural design fulfills the building specification needs as determined by the district.	Yes	7-15
	11. New construction, remodeling, and renovations incorporate effective safety features.	Yes	7-15
	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	7-15
	13. The district has effective management processes for construction projects.	Yes	7-16
<b>New Construction, Renovation and Remodeling</b>	14. District planning provides realistic time frames for implementation that are coordinated with the opening of schools.	Yes	7-16
	15. All projects started after March 1, 2002, comply with the Florida Building Code.	N/A	7-16
	16. The district requires appropriate inspection of all school construction projects.	Yes	7-16
	17. The district retains appropriate professionals to assist in facility planning, design, and construction.	Yes	7-17
	18. The district follows generally accepted and legal contracting practices to control costs.	Yes	7-17

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
	19. The district minimizes changes to facilities plans after final working drawings are initiated in order to control project costs.	Yes	7-18
	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	7-18
<b>Facility Occupancy and Evaluation</b>	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	7-18
	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.	Yes	7-19
	23. The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the construction program.	No	7-20
	24. The district regularly evaluates facilities construction operations based on established benchmarks and implements improvements to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.	No	7-21

## CONSTRUCTION PLANNING

### Best Practice 1: Using

**The district has effective long-range planning processes, but could improve its processes by prioritizing uses for construction money not dedicated to building new schools and including community members in its planning activities.**

Long-range facilities 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 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.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. The district has undergone several internal evaluations of its facilities needs. As the result of one needs assessment by district administrators, the district carried out a three-year round of major renovations to school roofs, heating/air conditioning systems, restrooms, and other repairs. These renovations are now complete. Another evaluation of need resulted in developing a long-range facilities plan (see Exhibit 7-5). The long-range planning process began with discussions among the superintendent, assistant superintendent for business and finance, and facilities director. The group explored multiple options to address the district's declining school enrollment, underutilized facilities and facilities condition problems, and designed a long-range plan to address these problems. These managers then presented options to the school board. The board discussed the options during meetings and held workshops to inform school personnel and members of the public.

The district's original long-range plan would have resulted in closing all district schools rated C-3 (unsatisfactory in one or more major aspects) in the most recent (2000) Educational Plant Survey. A C-3 rating indicates that a school is underutilized, in poor condition, or both. However, the board has modified the long-range plan to move its Midway Magnet School into two recently renovated buildings on the Quincy Educational Academy campus, which will remain open although classified in the Educational Plant Survey as C-3. An April 2003 inspection by the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium safety and fire inspector found over 600 items in the facility requiring attention, and the district must prepare a plan of action and a schedule for the correction of each deficiency.

The district still plans to replace its other C-3 schools with fewer and newer facilities (see Exhibit 7-5), thereby lowering its school operations and maintenance costs. The district should also save on other costs such as salaries and benefits for principals, teachers, and support personnel. By using state special facilities funding, the district will ultimately pay only about 15% of the \$29,738,789 total construction cost for East Gadsden High School (and presumably will pay a similar proportion for the other two planned facilities). This long-range plan should address many of the district's facilities problems cost-effectively.

Although the district is using this best practice, it could improve its operations in two ways. First, the district must more closely link its five-year facilities work plan and its long-range facilities plan. The



district's long-range plan sets out a number of major goals designed to meet the district's long-term needs, but its five-year plan does not address all of the intermediary steps the district will need to take in the short term to achieve the goals in the long-range plan. Best Practice 3 in this chapter discusses deficiencies in the district's five-year plan in more detail, and Action Plan 8-3 in Chapter 8 (Facilities Maintenance) contains steps for revising the plan to better address facility needs during the period when the long-range plan is being implemented.

Second, the district could benefit from increased stakeholder participation in its facilities planning processes. Although the district held public meetings to discuss its facilities plans, the district did not include community members in the development of the district's plans.

**We recommend that the district include community members in its facilities planning processes, including the development of its five-year and long-range plans.**

## **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.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could improve by exploring the joint construction or joint use of its facilities with community organizations. School district personnel state that there have never been requests from the community for joint use of school facilities, and do not believe there is much demand for such use. However, with one large new school almost complete, community desire to use of those new facilities (a stage and cafetorium, playing fields, classrooms and other amenities) may emerge. The district should be proactive in contacting the community's private sector and local government representatives to see whether it might be possible to reduce district construction costs using public-private partnerships.

**We recommend that the district contact city and county government officials and other community representatives to explore possible joint use and funding of planned facilities.**

## **Best Practice 3: Not Using**

**The five-year facilities work plan does not establish 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. Because 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.

## *Facilities Construction*

The Gadsden County School District has established a five-year plan as required by law. As discussed earlier, the district has also established a long-range plan to address many of its facilities problems, such as underutilized facilities and declining enrollment over time.

However, the district is not using this best practice because it does not use the five-year plan as a tool in setting spending and construction priorities beyond the current year. District administrators stated that a more accurate picture of its projected construction activity for Fiscal Year 2002-03 can be derived from internally generated documents. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 8 (Facilities Maintenance), district administrators stated that the repair, remodeling, and renovation projects in the district's facilities five-year work program are too tentative to be considered a good representation of what the district will actually perform.

Action Plan 8-3 in Chapter 8 (Facilities Maintenance) includes recommendations to address this issue.

### **Best Practice 4: Using**

#### **The school board ensures responsiveness to the community through open communication about the construction program and the five-year facilities work plan.**

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.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. That the board heeds community input is shown by its rejection of a recent proposal to close Chattahoochee High School. However, the district could improve its operations by implementing the recommendation to include additional community input in construction planning processes, as discussed under Best Practice 1 of this chapter.

### **Best Practice 5: Using**

#### **The district has 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.

The Gadsden County School district has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

## Best Practice 6: Using

**The board considers the most economical and practical sites for current and anticipated needs, including such factors as the 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 Gadsden County School district has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. The district considers appropriate factors in selecting sites, and the architect and project manager take reasonable steps to address potential problems that present barriers to development.

However, the district could improve its operations by revising its appraisal practices. According to a recent report by the Florida Office of the Auditor General, in July 2000 the land the district purchased for the East Gadsden High School was appraised at \$350,000 (\$200,000 for the land and \$150,000 for the timber).<sup>9</sup> After the appraisal but prior to the district's purchase, the landowner harvested some of the timber. The district paid \$300,000 for the land in July 2001, but the parcel was not reappraised after the timber was cut. The district did not have a current and accurate appraisal of the value of the land and timber for the school board's consideration at the time of purchase.

**We recommend that if any future appraisals do not reflect the actual value of the land as purchased, the district should obtain a revised appraisal to reflect the adjusted value.**

# 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 Gadsden County School district has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

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<sup>9</sup> Florida Office of the Auditor General, *Gadsden County District School Board, Annual Financial, Operational, and Federal Single Audit for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2002*, Audit Report No. 03-152.

### **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 Gadsden County School district has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

## **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.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could improve its facility development process by better documenting instructions to facility architects. The district determined district needs for the East Gadsden High School through discussions with principals, teachers and staff. The architect held over 30 meetings with various school personnel (such as the superintendent, principals, Exceptional Student Education teachers, coaches, the food service director, and the technology director) to ensure that instructional and technological needs were met when developing school plans. However, the district was not able to produce documentation of these discussions or of the instructions the district gave the architect. Such documentation would be helpful to ensure concerns were adequately addressed, plan future projects, and in case of miscommunication. Also, the district did not give school personnel an opportunity to review and respond to the architect’s plans once their recommendations had been taken into consideration. The district could improve its processes by implementing the recommendation below.

**We recommend that in the future the district include in its contract with its architects a provision that after stakeholders (such as principals, Exceptional Student Education teachers, food service administrators, and coaches) have given their input, the input is documented, and stakeholders have an opportunity to review the architect's plans to see how their concerns have been addressed.**

### **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 Gadsden County School district has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. The architect was involved with the design of East Gadsden High School very early in the building process and has worked closely for the past 1½ years on the school's construction, with input from the district as described in Best Practice 9. As curriculum needs have changed, the architect has worked with the district to ensure that changes in the design are made, to the extent that progress in building allows. However, the district was not able to produce documentation of the instructions given to the architect.

**We recommend that the district maintain documentation of the instructions given to the architect by the district.**

### **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 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

## **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.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **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 is 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **Best Practice 15: Not Applicable**

### **Best Practice 16: Using**

#### **The district requires appropriate inspection of all school construction projects, but could improve its processes for entering facilities into the Florida Inventory of School Houses.**

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 data base which contains extensive information about school sites, capacity, and condition.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district has not entered data for one of its schools (the Midway Magnet School) in the Florida Inventory of School Houses (FISH). The district's Midway Magnet School consists of rented relocatables and serves grades K to 3. FISH is used to report plant capacity and help determine district facilities funding levels. Therefore, FISH must accurately reflect the capacities and physical condition of the district's existing facilities. District personnel have simply not gotten to the task of entering data on this school, which began operation in 1999. Although the district has since decided to house Midway Magnet school in the building formerly housing the Quincy Educational Academy for the 2003-04 school year, the district still must enter information on the status of this school. The district also needs to enter the many changes presently occurring in the status of other district schools. The district has no process to ensure that data is promptly and accurately entered in the FISH database.

**We recommend that the district develop a process to ensure that data is entered into the Florida Inventory of School Houses in a timely and accurate fashion.**

### **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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could improve its operations by having a district representative present at all major bid openings. The Florida Office of the Auditor General recently cited the district for not having a district representative present at bid openings conducted by its construction contractor, and thus providing only

limited assurance that the construction manager complied with the terms of its contract in the handling and awarding of subcontractor bids.<sup>10</sup>

**We recommend that a district representative, preferably the facilities director, be present at all major bid openings conducted by the district's construction managers.**

### **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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **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.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet this best practice.

## **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

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<sup>10</sup> Florida Office of the Auditor General, *Gadsden County District School Board, Annual Financial, Operational, and Federal Single Audit for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2002*, Audit Report No. 03-152.



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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet this best practice.

## **Best Practice 22: Using**

### **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.**

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.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. The district plans to evaluate the new East Gadsden High School at the end of its first year, in conjunction with the expiration of its construction warranty. Gathering information about the new school is of greater importance in view of the district's plan to use an essentially identical school design if it receives special facilities funding to construct a new West Gadsden High School.

However, the district would benefit from implementing a formal system to collect data on the cost of maintenance and operations for the new facility in order to better evaluate its performance and identify and make improvements in subsequent schools. The Department of Education, Office of Educational Facilities has developed a process for post-occupancy building evaluation that can serve as a model for the district. In addition, district managers should also conduct interviews with school employees and make site visits to observe how the new facility is being used and obtain feedback. The collected data can then be analyzed to suggest improvements in existing and future facilities.

**We recommend that the district develop a post-occupancy building evaluation process to ensure that such evaluations occur regularly. The process should focus on building performance from the point of view of the building's users (school employees and students). It should include a survey of users, an operations cost analysis, a comparison of the finished product with the educational and construction specifications, and recommendations for future improvements.**

### **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. Since the Department of Education has means to hold accountable projects built with special facilities funding, this best practice addresses only projects not built with special facilities funding.

The Gadsden County School District has good accountability mechanisms at the project manager level. The district also provides the school board with information summarizing annual construction activities, including start and finish dates, status, estimated remaining costs per project, and progress over time. However, the district is not meeting the intent of this best practice because it does not evaluate construction projects using clear performance and cost expectations and the information presented to the board does not readily permit a determination as to whether projects were completed on time and within budget. (See also the discussion under Chapter 2, Management Structures, Best Practice 2.) The facilities director should give the board periodic and systematic status reports on each major construction project in meeting budget and timeliness expectations. The board should be apprised of information such as the cost of projects as planned, as contracted, and as completed; the estimated completion date at the time of contracting and the actual completion date; and any other benchmarking information the board may wish, such as cost per square foot.

Action Plan 7-1 contains steps to provide the school board with an annual accountability report on the status of construction projects. The accountability reports should cover major construction projects as well as repair, renovation, and remodeling projects paid with fixed capital outlay monies.

**Action Plan 7-1**

**We recommend that the facilities director make an annual presentation to the board, giving a comprehensive overview of the status of district’s major construction projects in meeting budget and timeliness objectives.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Within the next three months, schedule a presentation by the facilities director to the school board on the state of major construction projects. Prior to the presentation, determine and submit to the facilities director an information request for the data that the school board requires in order to be able to evaluate the district’s performance in meeting major construction budget and timeliness objectives.</p> <p>Step 2. Agenda the presentation, ensuring that there is adequate time for discussion and questions. Schedule further follow-up meetings or workshops as required to ensure that it has adequate time to understand the information received.</p> <p>Step 3. Schedule such presentations annually or more often. This step should be implemented in conjunction with Action Plan 3-1 in Chapter 3 (Performance Accountability).</p>
Who Is Responsible	Gadsden County School Board and facilities director
Time Frame	December 2004

**Best Practice 24: Not Using**

**The district does not regularly evaluate 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 Gadsden County School District school board should evaluate the district’s major maintenance and construction projects annually, with information provided by the Facilities Director. Action Plans 7-1 and 3-1 include the steps needed to implement this recommendation.



# Facilities Maintenance

## Summary

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The Gadsden County School District is using 15 of the 22 best practices relating to facilities maintenance. The district has established goals, objectives, job descriptions, and an annual budget with spending limits for the maintenance department. The district has established a long-range facilities plan that will cost-effectively address the district’s declining student enrollment and limited maintenance funding. Although district schools have numerous condition problems, some schools may not warrant the commitment of resources to perform repairs because they are scheduled for closure. To use the remaining best practices, the district should establish better accountability mechanisms for maintenance and custodial work, more proactively prioritize and address serious maintenance problems and incorporate plans for addressing these problems in its planning and budgeting documents, provide a standard training program for maintenance and custodial workers, and establish a written energy management plan.



As seen in Exhibit 8-1, the district has an opportunity to reduce energy costs. 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 into the classroom or addressing deficiencies identified in this report.

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

Best Practice Number	Fiscal Impact: Savings					Total
	Year 2003-04	Year 2004-05	Year 2005-06	Year 2006-07	Year 2007-08	
15 Establish a written energy management plan with incentives for schools to reduce energy consumption	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$300,000

## ***Background***

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The Gadsden County School District's Maintenance Department is responsible for all aspects of preventive, routine, and emergency upkeep for the district's 17 schools and other district facilities. In total, the department maintains approximately 1,349,958 million gross square feet of building space. Additional responsibilities include contracting for the maintenance of athletic fields and some school grounds, installation and relocation of relocatable classrooms, and repair of custodial equipment such as vacuum cleaners and lawn mowers.

The department had an adopted budget of \$1.6 million for the 2002-03 fiscal year. The department charges school cost centers for materials and supplies directly attributable to a particular school. Materials and supplies such as gas for vehicles and HVAC filters are paid out of the Maintenance Department's budget.

The district uses site-based management for custodial personnel. Custodians are assigned to schools and report to school principals. Custodians are responsible for cleaning school facilities, helping to identify safety hazards or maintenance problems, and in some cases, performing grounds maintenance. Custodial salaries and benefits are included in school budgets. Custodial supplies are budgeted at the district level, but charged to school cost centers during the year.

The Maintenance Department includes a Coordinator of Custodial Services who assists schools with the oversight and support of custodial personnel. His responsibility is to maintain the district inventory of custodial supplies, tools, and materials, and make these items available to schools when ordered; assist in the assignment, scheduling, and training of custodial staff; and routinely inspect schools for cleanliness and safety hazards.

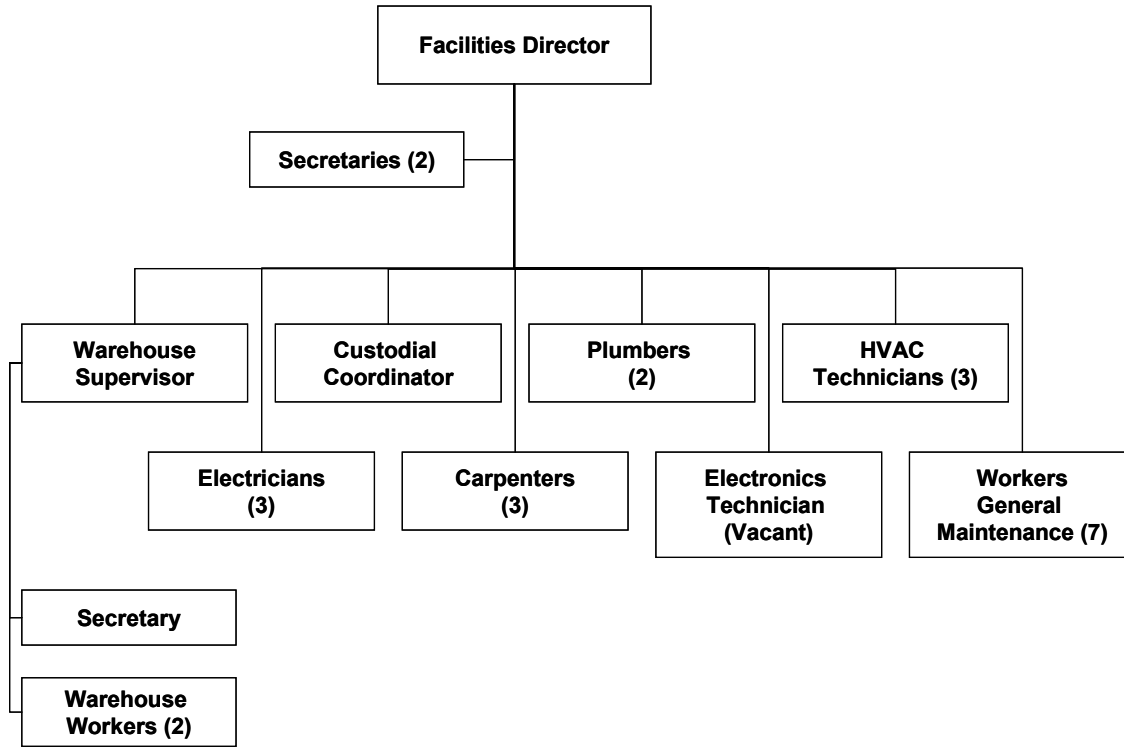
***Organization and management.*** As shown in Exhibit 8-2, the Maintenance Department has 26 authorized positions in various skilled trades, clerical, supervisory, and maintenance and custodial support positions.<sup>1</sup> The district Facilities Director supervises all of the employees in the Maintenance Department. The maintenance office includes two secretaries and the Coordinator of Custodial Services. The department's skilled trade employees include plumbers, carpenters, electricians, and HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) technicians. Seven general maintenance workers support these employees. The Maintenance Department also includes the district's warehouse supervisor, secretary, and two workers, but these employees are not funded out of the Maintenance Department's budget. The warehouse is primarily used to house food and school supplies. Maintenance supplies are housed in the maintenance building and on maintenance trucks.

School principals at each school supervise custodial personnel with the assistance of a head custodian. Principals are responsible for hiring custodians, monitoring their job performance, and conducting their performance evaluations.

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<sup>1</sup> This number does not include the positions for Electronics Technicians. Department management told us that these positions have remained vacant. If these services are needed and cannot be provided by other personnel, the department obtains services from the private sector.

**Exhibit 8-2  
The Gadsden County School District's Maintenance Department  
Includes Positions in Various Skilled Trades, Clerical, Supervisory,  
and Maintenance and Custodial Support Positions**



Source: Gadsden County School District, effective September 2002.

**Activities of particular interest**

The district safety committee has recently implemented safety walkthroughs of schools. The safety committee is composed of various district administrators, a principal, and union representatives. Committee members meet monthly and schedule school walkthroughs by selecting dates on which five to seven members are available to conduct the walkthroughs. The original purpose of the walkthroughs was to reduce the district's liability insurance rates, but the walkthroughs have evolved into a comprehensive review of possible safety hazards. For example, a walkthrough might identify tripping hazards, poorly stored chemicals, or unnecessary clutter in storage areas.

The committee provides a written summary of the walkthrough results to the school principal. The letter to the principal identifies corrective action to be taken by school personnel, as well as items that need to be addressed by sending work orders to the Maintenance Department. The principal is given approximately one month to respond back in writing about corrective actions taken.

The committee implemented this system in December 2002. The committee's goal for Fiscal Year 2002-03 was to visit each school once. For Fiscal Year 2003-04, the committee's goal will be to conduct two visits of each school.

# Conclusion and Recommendations

## Summary of Conclusions for Facilities Maintenance Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
<b>Program Direction and Accountability</b>	1. The district's maintenance and operations department has a mission statement and goals and objectives that are established in writing.	Yes	8-6
	2. The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance and efficiency of the maintenance and operations program.	No	8-6
	3. The district obtains and uses customer feedback to identify and implement program improvements.	No	8-8
	4. The district has established procedures and staff performance standards to ensure efficient operations.	Yes	8-9
	5. The department maintains educational and district support facilities in a condition that enhances student learning and facilitates employee productivity.	No	8-10
<b>Organizational Structure and Staffing</b>	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.	Yes	8-12
	7. Complete job descriptions and appropriate hiring and retention practices ensure that the maintenance and operations department has qualified staff.	Yes	8-13
	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.	No	8-13
<b>Resource Allocation and Utilization</b>	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	8-14
	10. The district accurately projects cost estimates of major maintenance projects.	Yes	8-15
	11. The board maintains a maintenance reserve fund to handle one-time expenditures necessary to support maintenance and operations.	No	8-15
	12. The district minimizes equipment costs through purchasing practices.	Yes	8-15
	13. The district provides maintenance and operations department staff the tools and equipment required to accomplish their assigned tasks.	Yes	8-16
	14. The district uses proactive maintenance practices to reduce maintenance costs.	Yes	8-16
	15. The maintenance and operations department identifies and implements strategies to contain energy costs.	No	8-17
	16. The district has an energy management system in place, and the system is maintained at original specifications for maximum effectiveness.	Yes	8-19
	17. District personnel regularly review maintenance and operation's costs and services and evaluate the potential for outside contracting and privatization.	Yes	8-20
<b>Information Management</b>	18. A computerized control and tracking system is used to accurately track work orders and inventory.	Yes	8-20

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
	19. The maintenance and operations department has a system for prioritizing maintenance needs uniformly throughout the district.	Yes	8-21
<b>Health and Safety</b>	20. District policies and procedures clearly address the health and safety conditions of facilities.	No	8-21
	21. The school district complies with federal and state regulatory mandates regarding facility health and safety conditions.	Yes	8-22
	22. The district is aware of and prepared for the permitting and inspection requirements of the Florida Building Code.	Yes	8-22



## PROGRAM DIRECTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

### Best Practice 1: Using

#### **The district has a mission statement, goals, and objectives for maintenance and operations.**

As with other publicly funded entities, a school district should be accountable 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.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### Best Practice 2: Not Using

#### **The district has not established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance and efficiency of the maintenance and 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 maintenance and operations costs per square foot (including energy use), costs per student, customer satisfaction with services, and timeliness of maintenance work.<sup>2</sup> As part of its accountability system a district also should periodically provide school board members performance information that helps them assess the efficiency and effectiveness of its maintenance program. In addition, district maintenance and operations supervisors should regularly evaluate the performance of all maintenance and operations work.

The Gadsden County School District splits responsibility for monitoring the quality of maintenance and custodial work. The Facilities Director is responsible for monitoring the quality of maintenance work, while responsibility for monitoring the quality of custodial work is assigned to head custodians, school principals, and to some extent the Coordinator of Custodial Services. Head custodians provide on-site monitoring on a day-to-day basis. School principals evaluate the work of head custodians and assistant custodians, and some have developed ways to assist in this endeavor. For example, one school assistant principal developed a survey of teachers to determine whether custodians were conducting their work as assigned. Another school principal created sign-off sheets so that custodial workers could document that they had performed their assigned tasks each day. The sign-off sheets also serve as a reminder to workers to help ensure they remember to perform each task. The Coordinator of Custodial Services assists principals when requested to investigate any problems with custodial work, such as determining whether a custodian understands how to properly use equipment or cleaning products.

However, the district is not using this best practice for two reasons. First, the district has no performance or cost-efficiency measures to assess and report on maintenance and custodial work. Examples of measures that the district could implement include maintenance and operations cost per gross square foot, maintenance and operations cost per student, customer satisfaction with maintenance services, customer satisfaction with custodial services, and the timeliness of maintenance work. The lack of performance

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<sup>2</sup> All Florida school districts are required to report operations and maintenance costs and energy usage to the Department of Education annually, and this information is readily available to school districts for comparative purposes.

measures and reports limits the district’s ability to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of its maintenance and custodial functions.

The district could establish benchmarks for performance comparisons using previous performance or peer district statistics.<sup>3</sup> For example, peer district comparisons show that Gadsden had the highest maintenance and operations cost per gross square foot and maintenance and operations cost per student in Fiscal Year 2001-02 (see Exhibit 8-3). The district should establish measures in key areas to assess and improve its performance and cost compared to similarly sized or peer school districts.

**Exhibit 8-3  
For Fiscal Year 2001-02, the Gadsden County School District Had the Highest Maintenance and Operations Cost per Gross Square Foot and per Student Compared to Peer Districts**

District	Total Maintenance and Operations Cost <sup>1</sup>	Gross Square Feet Maintained <sup>2</sup>	Fiscal Year 2001-02 FTE Students <sup>3</sup>	Maintenance and Operations Cost per Gross Square Foot	Maintenance and Operations Cost per Student
Jefferson	\$1,084,588.82	421,361	1,632.89	\$2.57	\$664.21
Dixie	1,660,001.40	613,978	2,180.46	2.70	761.31
Madison	1,955,532.11	599,541	3,392.36	3.26	576.45
Jackson	4,918,277.62	1,492,223	7,008.25	3.30	701.78
Columbia	5,782,919.54	1,551,970	9,474.59	3.73	610.36
<b>Gadsden</b>	<b>5,387,963.62</b>	<b>1,349,958</b>	<b>6,822.22</b>	<b>3.99</b>	<b>789.77</b>
<b>Average without Gadsden</b>	<b>\$3,080,263.90</b>	<b>935,815</b>	<b>4,737.71</b>	<b>\$3.29</b>	<b>\$650.16</b>

<sup>1</sup> Operations cost includes utilities, custodial, and insurance costs associated with buildings.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to school buildings, includes facilities such as administrative offices and transportation facilities.

<sup>3</sup> The number of students shown in this exhibit differs from the enrollment numbers shown in Chapter 1. The numbers in Chapter 1 are based on FDOE membership counts, which are essentially a headcount of the number of students. The numbers in this exhibit are full-time equivalent (FTE) students, which is a calculation of the number of students in certain programs for a school year or its equivalent. Most school district funding from the state is based on the number of FTE students.

Source: Florida Department of Education.

Action Plan 3-1 in Chapter 3 (Performance Accountability) includes recommendations for establishing performance and cost-efficiency measures for district programs.

Second, the Maintenance Department is not being held sufficiently accountable for its responsiveness to its customers, completing work in a timely manner, and informing schools when their work will be delayed due to lack of budget, materials, or manpower. The department uses a paper work order system. Although this system helps to organize and prioritize work, the work order system as currently implemented places a barrier between the Maintenance Department and schools rather than serving as a way to be more responsive to their needs. School personnel, usually principals, fill out the work orders, designate a priority for the work to show urgency, and send these to the Maintenance Department. The Facilities Director reviews the work orders and assigns the work to various maintenance employees with a due date. When the work is completed, the employee is supposed to sign off on completion, and the maintenance office is supposed to send a copy of the completed work order to the school.

<sup>3</sup> The Florida Department of Education collects information on school district operations and maintenance cost, as well as the net and gross square footage of space being maintained. The district could obtain this information for peer district comparisons. The district would need to collect its own information regarding customer satisfaction and timeliness of maintenance work and set performance objectives for improvement against prior year performance.

We determined based on interviews and review of work order files that school administrators do not always receive information about when their requested work will be started or when work in process will be completed. Unless they call the Maintenance Department to inquire, they may not know when their requested work will be conducted until a maintenance worker appears. Also, maintenance employees are not consistently signing off on completed work, and the Maintenance Department is not checking to see whether scheduled work is actually conducted and completed on time. The Maintenance Department does not oversee the quality of maintenance work unless a complaint is received.

Action Plan 8-1 includes recommendations for improving the Maintenance Department’s use of its work order system by implementing an e-mail work order system to communicate with schools about when requested work is scheduled to commence and to monitor whether work is being completed as scheduled. This action plan should be implemented in conjunction with Action Plan 5-3 in Chapter 5 (Administrative and Instructional Technology), which recommends that the district increase the use of email to communicate.

**Action Plan 8-1**

**We recommend that the Maintenance Department develop an e-mail work order system and use the system to communicate with schools about when requested work is scheduled to commence and to monitor whether work is completed as scheduled.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Develop an e-mail work order system. This system should include a simple form that can be printed, saved, or logged by the schools so that they can track the status of their requests.</p> <p>Step 2. Once the Facilities Director has evaluated requested work and scheduled a date to conduct the work, report back to schools via e-mail regarding when their work is scheduled to commence or why it is being delayed.</p> <p>Step 3. Log each work order and scheduled date for completion, and use the log to match requested work orders to completed work orders. Notify the director of work that has not been completed when scheduled.</p> <p>Step 4. Require maintenance employees to sign off on completion of each job and provide this documentation to the Maintenance Department.</p> <p>Step 5. Investigate reasons for delays in completing work on schedule.</p> <p>Step 6. The Facilities Director should meet with maintenance employees to discuss why deviations from scheduled work occur.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Facilities Director, Maintenance Department secretaries, and Information Technology Department
Time Frame	July 2004

**Best Practice 3: Not Using**

**The district does not obtain and use customer feedback to identify and implement maintenance and custodial 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.<sup>4</sup> This type of survey should be performed at least annually and summary results should be shared with maintenance employees, custodians, 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.

At least one school in the Gadsden County School District was using a survey to obtain customer feedback on the work of custodians. School principals also reported receiving feedback from teachers during faculty meetings and through other discussions about the quality of custodial work.

<sup>4</sup> A district may also survey students, parents, or other stakeholders as may be appropriate.

However, the district is not using this best practice because it has not established a districtwide means of obtaining customer feedback about maintenance and custodial work. The Maintenance Department makes no effort to obtain customer feedback on the timeliness and quality of its work. The Maintenance Department does not query principals or head custodians about maintenance concerns. For custodial work, the district has left monitoring up to school principals and has not conducted any districtwide assessments of how well this system is working to meet the needs of principals, teachers, students, and administrative employees.<sup>5</sup>

Action Plan 8-2 includes recommendations for obtaining customer feedback about maintenance and custodial work.

**Action Plan 8-2**

**We recommend that the Maintenance Department annually survey principals, teachers, and administrative employees regarding their satisfaction with maintenance and custodial work, and use this information to target areas needing improvement.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop survey instruments to assess customer satisfaction with maintenance and custodial work.
	Step 2.	Annually survey principals and a sample of teachers and administrative employees about their satisfaction with maintenance and custodial work.
	Step 3.	Annually report survey results to district and school personnel and maintenance and custodial workers.
	Step 4.	Use survey results to target areas needing improvement and make recommendations to the superintendent and school board about any need for districtwide change.
Who Is Responsible	Facilities Director and Coordinator of Custodial Services	
Time Frame	July 2004	

**Best Practice 4: Using**

**The district has established some objectives and task descriptions to ensure efficient operations, but lacks written standards and operating procedures for maintenance and custodial work.**

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, trade 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. The district has established objectives and task descriptions for each type of position as part of its job description and performance evaluation system. However, the district could improve its operations by establishing written operating procedures and performance standards for maintenance and custodial workers. With the exception of written purchasing policies, there are no written policies or procedures for

- how long routine maintenance and custodial tasks should take, based on an internal review of current standards of performance;

<sup>5</sup> Although the district conducts an annual climate survey, the survey is not used as a comprehensive means of evaluating customer satisfaction with maintenance and custodial work.

## Facilities Maintenance

- delineating exactly which duties are the responsibility of maintenance and which are the responsibility of custodial employees;
- minimum facility maintenance and cleanliness standards and how failure to meet those standards will be communicated;
- handling hazardous materials;
- ensuring that all schools are equitably maintained; and
- prioritizing maintenance and custodial tasks.

The district should develop procedures and standards to help ensure adequate staff training and to communicate management's performance expectations for employees. It is particularly important for the district to clearly define custodial expectations and hold employees accountable, since custodians are the front-line employees responsible for school conditions. To help develop procedures and standards, the district can review popular maintenance and custodial services benchmarking manuals, as well as consult with other school districts of various sizes on their policies, procedures, and standards. The district can also review Florida Department of Education maintenance and custodial peer data to compare operations and set goals.

**We recommend that the district establish written operating procedures and performance standards for maintenance and custodial workers.**

### Best Practice 5: Not Using

**Although many of the district's schools are presently in poor condition, implementing the district's long-range facilities plan will address many of these problems by closing schools that are underutilized and/or in poor condition and replacing these schools with fewer and newer facilities.**

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 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.

The Gadsden County School District Maintenance Department has designated one employee to perform preventive maintenance on HVAC systems on a full-time basis. Also, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 (Facilities Construction), the district has developed a long-range facilities plan that includes building two new high schools and a new elementary school. The plan calls for consolidating students into the new schools and rearranging the current use of facilities so that six school sites can be closed and four can be converted to other uses.<sup>6</sup> This plan cost-effectively addresses the district's declining student enrollment and limited maintenance funding. As discussed in Chapter 7, some of the district's schools are significantly underutilized.<sup>7</sup> By closing schools that are underutilized and/or in poor condition and replacing these schools with fewer and newer facilities, the district will have a reduced responsibility for

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<sup>6</sup> The school sites that would be closed are Midway Magnet School, Havana Northside High School, Chattahoochee High School, Greensboro Elementary, Gretna Elementary, and St. Johns Elementary. Carter Parramore Middle School would be converted to housing administrative personnel and alternative programs. Greensboro High School would be converted to accommodate Greensboro Elementary School. Shanks High School would be converted to accommodate Carter Parramore Middle School. Quincy Educational Academy would be partially renovated to accommodate the students currently housed in the relocatables comprising the Midway Magnet School.

<sup>7</sup> For example, as discussed in Chapter 7, Chattahoochee High School's utilization its capacity is 37% and James A. Shanks High School's rate is 49%.

school operations and maintenance. The district should also save on other costs such as salaries and benefits for principals, teachers, and support personnel.

However, the district is not currently using this best practice because many of the district's schools are presently in poor condition. During our walk-through of seven schools we observed a number of maintenance problems. These problems included

- peeling paint over the outside of many buildings,
- signs of leaking roofs,
- loose handrails, protruding nails, splintered wood, and possible wood rot on steps leading to relocatables,
- large tears in carpet,
- vegetation growing in roof gutters,
- signs of water seeping into classrooms,
- missing floor tiles, and
- standing water on school grounds.

School personnel stated that these problems had existed for many years. Although some schools may not warrant the commitment of resources to perform repairs because they are scheduled for closure, the district plans to continue operating others. For example, district plans call for using one of the schools with condition problems (Carter Parramore) to house administrative offices and the district's alternative program.

Although the school district has approximately \$2 million in unallocated fixed capital outlay funds, at the time of our fieldwork the school board had not made a final decision on how to spend these funds. We reviewed the school district's facilities five-year work program and saw plans to address some of the district's more significant maintenance problems, but some of these projects were also listed in the section on projects that cannot be funded from current projected revenues. Moreover, district administrators told us that the projects in the five-year work program are too tentative to be considered a good representation of what the district will actually perform. They were awaiting direction from the board on how to spend the monies available in future fiscal years.

If the district is able to obtain the special facilities funding needed to implement its long-range facilities plan, it will have limited fixed capital outlay funds for the next seven years. The district has one more year in the three-year funding arrangement required by state special facilities funding to pay for the new East Gadsden High School.<sup>8</sup> Once this project is considered paid off, the district plans to seek state special facilities funding to build a west side high school. When this second high school is paid off, the district plans to seek special facility funding to build a new elementary school. Due to the statutory requirements for special facilities funding, the district must commit most of its millage funding for three years to pay toward each facility built with special facilities funding. As a result, the district will need to commit most of its fixed capital outlay funds over the next seven years to new construction.<sup>9</sup>

Implementing the district's long-range facilities plan will resolve some of the district's maintenance problems. By consolidating students into fewer and newer schools, the district should be able to reduce

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<sup>8</sup> As specified by s. 1013.64, *Florida Statutes*, the Florida Department of Education has established an account called the Special Facility Construction Account. The fund is used to provide funding to school districts with urgent construction needs and a lack of sufficient resources to meet these needs with currently authorized capital outlay revenue. School districts obtaining these funds must be assessing the full statutory authorization of 2.0 mills of their millage against their nonexempt assessed property value, and pay no more than 1.5 mills of this amount per year toward the project for a period of three years. The Gadsden County School District has levied the maximum of 2.0 mills for capital outlay, which leaves one-half mill to fund other capital outlay needs over the three-year period

<sup>9</sup> After paying 1.5 mills toward each special facilities funding project, the district will have one-half mills for fixed capital outlay projects (approximately \$400,000 annually) plus whatever funds the state provides to the district that can be used for maintenance and repairs. Currently, the district is able to budget approximately \$1.6 million annually for the Maintenance Department.

its maintenance costs to a manageable level. In the meantime, the district should make every effort to proactively identify, prioritize, and address its worst maintenance problems, particularly in schools that are not planned for closure, using its unallocated fixed capital outlay funds and other funds available for maintenance work. The district should place a priority on life, health, and safety issues. For example, the Maintenance Department should conduct walkthroughs of schools and obtain input from school principals and head custodians about serious maintenance problems. The Facilities Director and school principals should document these problems with work orders so that they can be incorporated into district planning and budgeting documents. The district school board should use this information to prioritize projects and establish more definitive plans regarding how the district will address renovation and repair needs over the next seven years.

Action Plan 8-3 contains steps to address district facility maintenance needs on a short-term basis by proactively identifying, prioritizing, and addressing its worst maintenance problems, particularly in schools that are not planned for closure, using unallocated fixed capital outlay funds and other funds available for maintenance work. The district should also continue with its long-range facilities plans to build new schools, consolidate students, and shut down schools that are underutilized and/or in poor condition.

**Action Plan 8-3**

**We recommend that the district proactively identify, prioritize, and address its worst maintenance problems, particularly in schools that are not planned for closure, using remaining fixed capital outlay funds and other funds available for maintenance.**

Action Needed	Step 1. Conduct assessments of schools to identify serious deferred maintenance problems. Step 2. Solicit input from school principals, head custodians, and maintenance workers regarding serious maintenance problems and make sure that schools have submitted work orders to address these problems. Step 3. Prioritize school maintenance problems and present recommendations to the school board for spending the district's unallocated fixed capital outlay funds and addressing renovation and repair needs during the seven-year period before the district has completed its facility construction plans. <sup>1</sup> Step 4. Establish a school board plan for budgeting the district's unallocated fixed capital outlay funds and addressing renovation and repair needs. Priority should be placed on life, health, and safety issues. Step 5. Incorporate the school board's decisions into the district's facilities repair and renovation planning and budgeting documents, such as the district's facilities five-year work plan.
Who Is Responsible	Facilities Director, Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance, and School Board
Time Frame	July 2004 for establishing plans

<sup>1</sup> Subsequent to our fieldwork, the district identified high priority building condition problems and the school board approved a list of projects to address these problems using unallocated fixed capital outlay funds. The district should ensure that these projects are implemented as planned and that projects address the high priority needs identified.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND STAFFING

### Best Practice 6: Using

**The district regularly reviews the organizational structure of the maintenance and operations program to minimize administrative layers and assure adequate supervision and staffing levels.**

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 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 employees that employees will individually handle multiple areas of responsibility (such as facilities maintenance and transportation) that may be done by different individuals in larger districts.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **Best Practice 7: Using**

#### **Complete job descriptions and appropriate hiring and retention practices ensure that the maintenance and operations program has 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 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **Best Practice 8: Not Using**

#### **The district does not provide a staff development program that includes appropriate training for maintenance and custodial employees 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 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 available training sources including vendors and manufacturers of 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, 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 Gadsden County School District has provided some training to maintenance and custodial workers. Custodians receive on-the-job training from head custodians, and the Coordinator of Custodial Services at times conducts training workshops to discuss new products, primarily for head custodians. The Maintenance Department may arrange demonstrations from manufacturer’s representatives for



maintenance workers and may at times send workers to specialized training, such as for a worker designated to maintain the HVAC systems at the new high school.

However, the district is not using this best practice because it has not established a standard training program for maintenance and custodial workers. The school district formerly contracted with a private company to provide services such as oversight of custodial work, a preventive maintenance program, a computerized work order system, and a training program for maintenance and custodial workers. School district managers made the decision to no longer retain these services and instead provide them in-house. Although district managers have established mechanisms to replace some services such as oversight of custodial work, the district has not established a training program for maintenance and custodial workers.

Gadsden County School District recently joined the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium (PAEC) and could take advantage of its low and no cost training opportunities for custodial and maintenance workers. The district should review the training offered by PAEC and select topics of benefit to maintenance and custodial workers. For example, PAEC offers training on topics such as custodial and maintenance safety, first aid, how to prevent back injuries, and sexual harassment. The district could also continue to use training offered by manufacturer’s representatives.

The Maintenance Department should also conduct in-house training to show custodians how to conduct minor maintenance tasks. To the extent that custodians are able to conduct minor maintenance tasks, the Maintenance Department can avoid the travel and salary cost of sending someone to perform minor repairs. For example, custodians could be trained in how to shut off water leaks, unstop toilets, and tighten door handles.

Action Plan 8-4 contains recommendations to establish a standard training program for maintenance and custodial workers.

**Action Plan 8-4**

**We recommend that the Maintenance Department establish a standard training program for maintenance and custodial workers.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Review PAEC and vender training opportunities for maintenance and custodial workers.
	Step 2.	Develop a basic set of required training for maintenance and custodial workers, including safety issues such as how to handle chemicals, first aid, and how to prevent back injuries.
	Step 3.	Inform school principals about the need for custodial training.
	Step 4.	Schedule workers for training offered by PAEC and vendors.
	Step 5.	Schedule in-house custodial workshops on how to perform minor maintenance tasks.

Who Is Responsible	Facilities Director and Coordinator of Custodial Services
Time Frame	July 2004

## **RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND UTILIZATION**

### **Best Practice 9: Using**

**The administration 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 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **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.<sup>10</sup> 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.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **Best Practice 11: Not Using**

#### **The board does not maintain a reserve fund to handle one-time expenditures necessary to support maintenance and operations.**

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 district is not using this best practice because, as discussed in Chapter 11 (Cost Controls), the district General Fund unreserved fund balance has been virtually depleted as of April 2003, mainly as a result of a recent salary increase provided to employees. Adequately established and prioritized financial objectives may assist the district in monitoring its financial status and limiting expenditures to meet established minimum fund balance goals. Refer to Best Practice 8 in Chapter 11 and Action Plan 3-1 in Chapter 3.

### **Best Practice 12: Using**

#### **The district minimizes equipment costs through 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 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 Gadsden County School District has purchasing processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

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<sup>10</sup> Individual projects that are beyond the scope of routine maintenance work are considered major maintenance projects.

### **Best Practice 13: Using**

**The district provides maintenance and custodial staff the tools and equipment required to accomplish their assigned tasks, but should evaluate whether to further privatize school lawn service responsibilities.**

To be efficient and effective in completing their day-to-day activities, maintenance and custodial 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could improve its operations by addressing the availability of lawn equipment for school custodians, or privatizing school lawn maintenance altogether. As discussed earlier, the district has contracted out for lawn maintenance of athletic fields and some school grounds. However, custodians are responsible for grounds maintenance at some schools. The Maintenance Department repairs these schools' lawn equipment as needed. Several head custodians reported that the Maintenance Department takes two weeks to repair lawn mowers, during which time they have nothing to use to mow the grounds. According to the interviews with Maintenance Department personnel, the worker assigned to repair lawn equipment has other responsibilities and the department's practice is to let equipment pile up until enough exists to have this worker repair several at once.

**We recommend that the Maintenance Department evaluate the possibility of further privatizing school lawn service responsibilities in two ways. First, the department should review the cost-effectiveness of privatizing the remainder of school lawn service responsibilities. Second, if the department determines that it is not cost-effective to privatize the remainder of school lawn service responsibilities, the department should review its lawn equipment repair practices with the goal of improving turnaround time. This evaluation should include consideration of whether it is in the schools' best interest to give them the option to use private repair services for lawn equipment (at the schools' expense) if the department is not able to give a higher priority to this task.**

### **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 districtwide 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. As discussed earlier, the district Maintenance Department has one employee assigned on a full-time basis to conduct preventive maintenance on HVAC systems. His duties include changing filters, oiling machinery and changing belts. He is also tasked with reporting any serious problems to the Facilities Director so that a trained HVAC technician can be sent to make repairs. These systems are expensive to repair and require extensive preventive maintenance to remain in good working order, so the department has given this area a priority. The district prioritizes and addresses other problems as resources become available.

**Best Practice 15: Not Using**

**The district has identified and implemented some strategies to contain energy costs, but does not have an energy management plan.**

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, and 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 Gadsden County School District finance office monitors school utility bills and identifies those needing investigation. For example, one school’s power bill recently quadrupled over a three-month period. The Facilities Director investigated the cause of this increase and determined it was caused by unseasonably cold temperature and increases in energy costs. The district also has recently upgraded HVAC equipment in five schools and installed control equipment to help reduce energy costs. A computer in the Maintenance Department’s main office controls the HVAC systems for these schools. Department employees regulate the temperature in these facilities. They can also monitor the equipment to ensure it is operating properly. The Facilities Director reported that he is currently reviewing whether the energy savings from these systems are sufficient to warrant retrofitting the HVAC systems in additional schools.

However, the district is not using this best practice because it could further reduce energy costs by making schools responsible for their energy costs. As shown in Exhibit 8-4, the district is fifth out of six in the level of its energy costs compared to peer districts, and its energy costs of \$.89 per gross square foot exceed the average cost of \$.74 for the peer districts.

**Exhibit 8-4  
In Fiscal Year 2001-02, Gadsden County School District Was Fifth of Six in Energy Costs per Square Foot Compared to Peer Districts**

District	Fiscal Year 2001-02 Energy Costs	Gross Square Footage of Facilities <sup>1</sup>	Energy Cost per Gross Square Foot
Jefferson	\$235,778.91	421,361	\$0.56
Jackson	1,031,883.77	1,492,223	0.69
Dixie	441,222.52	613,978	0.72
Columbia	1,208,306.65	1,551,970	0.78
<b>Gadsden</b>	<b>1,195,942.19</b>	<b>1,349,958</b>	<b>0.89</b>
Madison	568,059.98	599,541	0.95

<b>Average without Gadsden</b>	<b>\$697,050.37</b>	<b>935,815</b>	<b>\$0.74</b>
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<sup>1</sup> In addition to school buildings, includes facilities such as administration offices and transportation facilities.  
 Source: Florida Department of Education.

A written energy management plan would hold schools more responsible for their energy costs and help the district save on these costs by establishing objectives and activities to reduce usage. One proven means of gaining energy use reductions and cost savings is an incentive-based program, which allows an individual school to share in whatever money it saves from reducing its utilities. The principal is charged with the responsibility of implementing the district’s energy savings plan, in turn communicating to the school’s employees and students the aspects of the plan and the resulting benefits. Simple strategies, including turning off lights when not in use, closing doors, and adjusting thermostats to 75-78 degrees in summer months and 68 in the winter, as well as more complex strategies recommended by the local power provider, will help in meeting targeted reductions and savings. Any resulting savings should be shared equally between the district and the school, allowing a cost savings to be realized by the district and the principal to increase available general school funds. Monthly cost and energy utilization reports are necessary to keep managers abreast of the program’s impact.

A district energy management plan should also include responsibilities for the Maintenance Department such as routinely replacing filters in air conditioning/heating systems, weather-stripping doors and thresholds, painting outside air conditioning equipment white to reflect solar heat, and contacting local utility providers to determine the availability of free energy audits for schools and other district facilities.

Elements of a good energy management plan are a mission statement, objectives, and activities similar to the following, which have been successfully used in another Florida school district. <sup>11</sup>

*Mission statement: To reduce energy waste and seek new ways to conserve and manage energy resources at school, at home, and in the community, through management and education.*

**Objectives:**

- Develop awareness of all facilities as to cost and quantities of energy consumption.
- Reduce utility costs by at least 10%.
- Instill a spirit of competition and cooperation among principals and faculty managers to conserve energy.

**Activities:**

- Survey all schools and other facilities for energy consumption and low cost/no cost conservation.
- Conduct a detailed study of electric power, gas, water, and sewer usage at each facility.
- Develop and monitor an incentive award program in schools that will reward conservation from utility savings.
- Develop a monthly reporting program to inform school and facility managers of energy and utility consumption on a monthly basis.
- Interface with utility companies to address the conservation of energy and reduce the operational cost to the school district.
- Review and evaluate billing for all utilities to ensure that favorable rates to the school district are available.

<sup>11</sup> These elements were derived from the Okaloosa County School District’s Energy Management Plan.

- Implement a program to secure federal/state funds through the institutional grant program of the department of energy.

Action Plan 8-5 contains recommendations for the district to establish a shared savings energy management plan. If the district were to reduce its energy consumption costs by just 5% (to approximately \$0.84 per square foot), it would save approximately \$60,000 annually.

**Action Plan 8-5**

**We recommend that the district develop and implement a shared savings energy management plan.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Review successful energy conservation and energy management programs. This would include programs in other school districts and professional energy management and maintenance organizations.
	Step 2.	Develop a district energy management plan in consultation with district stakeholders such as maintenance employees, custodians, site-based administrators, instructional personnel, and utility providers and other experts on energy conservation. The plan should include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a mission statement, objectives, and activities to reduce energy usage, such as sharing in savings</li> <li>▪ an energy audit to determine ways of reducing energy consumption and cost;</li> <li>▪ energy measures to be tracked by facility;</li> <li>▪ energy management training for students, teachers, administrators, and maintenance workers;</li> <li>▪ energy conservation checklists for students, teachers, administrators, and maintenance workers; and</li> <li>▪ incentive programs for schools to promote and reward student and staff for participation.</li> </ul>
	Step 3.	Meet with local utility providers and contact the Department of Community Affairs to discuss the availability of free energy audits.

Who Is Responsible	Facilities Director and Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance
Time Frame	July 2004

**Best Practice 16: Using**

**The district has some energy management systems in place.**

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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **Best Practice 17: Using**

**District personnel review maintenance and operations costs and services and evaluate the potential for outside contracting and privatization, but should evaluate the cost-effectiveness of further privatizing school lawn services.**

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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could improve its operations by implementing the recommendation for Best Practice 13 to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of further privatizing school lawn service responsibilities.

## **INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

### **Best Practice 18: Using**

**A control and tracking system is used to accurately track work orders, but the district should establish an e-mail work order system to improve communications with Maintenance Department customers and monitor whether work is being completed as scheduled.**

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.<sup>12</sup> 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, facilities condition assessments, while interfacing with other district financial programs. District administrators should receive sufficient training to maximize the potential of the system.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could improve its operations by implementing the recommendations in Action Plan 8-1 to establish an e-mail work order system to improve communication with Maintenance Department customers and monitor whether work is completed as scheduled.

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<sup>12</sup> 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.

### **Best Practice 19: Using**

**The Maintenance Department has a sufficient system for prioritizing maintenance needs throughout the district, but should draft a policy describing the priority that will be given to various types of maintenance requests.**

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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. As described earlier under Best Practice 2 of this chapter, the Gadsden County School District uses the Maintenance Department's work order system to establish priorities and schedule work. However, the district could improve its operations by establishing a school board policy describing the priority that will be given to various types of maintenance requests. Although the Facilities Director has periodically sent out directives regarding the types of maintenance requests that will be given priority, addressing priorities in the school board policies would make this information more accessible and provide better communication with principals, teachers, and other district employees.

**We recommend that the district establish a school board policy describing the priority that will be given to various types of maintenance requests.**

## **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

### **Best Practice 20: Not Using**

**Although district policies and procedures address the health and safety conditions of facilities, unaddressed water leaks may lead to indoor air quality problems.**

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.<sup>13</sup> 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 firesafety 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.

Gadsden County School Board policies state that the board shall strive to provide well-maintained schools and facilities that are safe from hazards, sanitary, properly equipped, and adequately lighted and ventilated. The district has recently implemented safety walkthroughs of schools to identify and address safety problems. The district uses a Panhandle Area Educational Consortium (PAEC) inspector to

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<sup>13</sup> See s. 1013.12, *F.S.*



conduct the required annual school safety inspections. The PAEC inspector provides written reports on safety violations, and establishes a priority for addressing these violations.

However, the district is not using this best practice because some of its schools showed signs of roof leaks and water seeping into classrooms, as discussed under Best Practice 5 of this chapter. Water leaks can lead to mold and mildew, causing indoor air quality problems. Action Plan 8-3 contains steps to address district school condition problems.

### **Best Practice 21: Using**

**The school 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.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place that meet the intent of this best practice.

### **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. Smaller school districts may find it easier and more economical to rely on local building code officials rather than establish their own permitting and inspection department. A small district should evaluate the potential advantages and disadvantages of operating a building department internally. If the decision is made to allow the local authority to provide the service, then the district and the local authority should have a memorandum of understanding defining each entity's responsibilities.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

# 9 Transportation

## Summary

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The Gadsden County School District is using 19 of the 20 transportation best practices. The district ensures that transportation staff can respond promptly and appropriately to vehicle accidents and breakdowns and that district vehicles are acquired economically and will be available to meet its current and future transportation needs. However, to meet the remaining best practice standard, the district should develop an accountability system for transportation operations and report performance to the school board on an annual basis.



As seen in Exhibit 9-1, the district has an opportunity to increase transportation revenues. 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 recommendation, 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 Recommendation Below**  
**Will Increase Transportation Revenues by \$54,000 over Five Years**

Best Practice Number	Fiscal Impact: Savings					Total
	Year 2003-04	Year 2004-05	Year 2005-06	Year 2006-07	Year 2007-08	
14 Collect reimbursement for qualified Medicaid trips	\$10,800	\$10,800	\$10,800	\$10,800	\$10,800	\$54,000

## Background

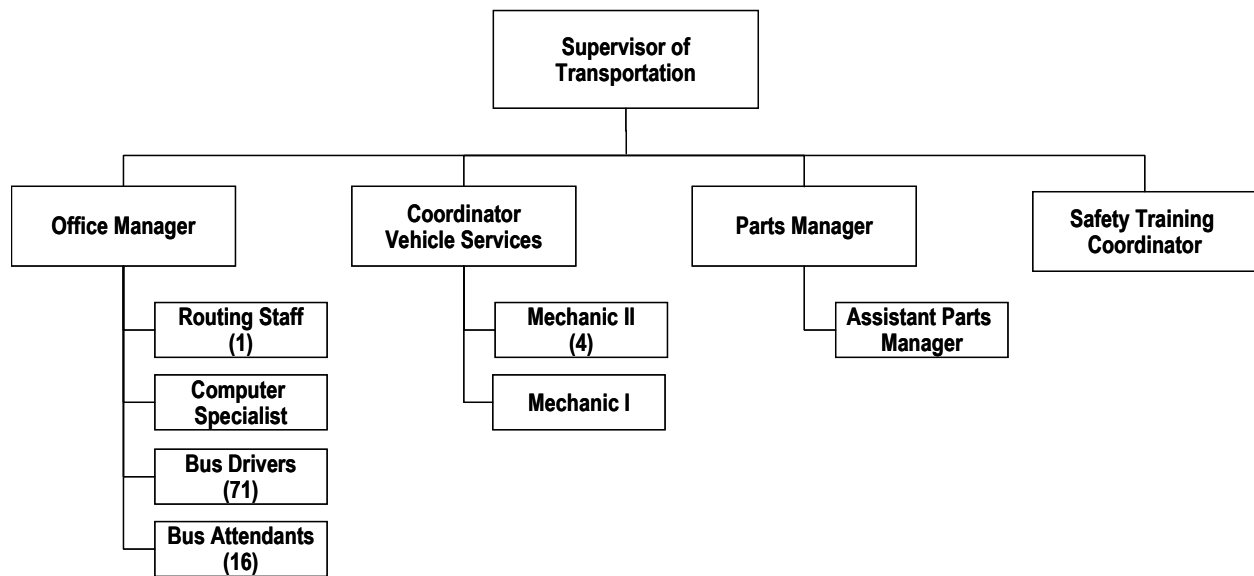
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Gadsden County is a rural county in Florida's Panhandle and is located west of Tallahassee. The county has 590 miles of paved and 416 miles of non-paved roads serving an area of 518 square miles. The county is experiencing a decline in its student population. For the School Year 2001-02, the district reported that it provided transportation to 5,279 of its 7,431 students (71.03 %). Currently, the district serves students in exceptional student education programs, including 30 students who require special transportation arrangements because of disabilities or the need for specialized classes.

Florida’s smaller rural school districts have the same functional operating responsibilities as the largest school districts in the state. However, small districts must accomplish these required tasks with significantly fewer personnel. The Gadsden County School District is typical of a small Florida district in that its lowest and mid-level administrators have a larger range of activities to administer and supervise.

All facets of district student transportation are under the management of the transportation supervisor. The department is subdivided into four sections: Office Management, Vehicle Service Coordination, Parts Management and Safety Training Coordination. The transportation supervisor directly supervises all of the bus drivers, bus attendants, vehicle maintenance, and parts staff (see Exhibit 9-2). The transportation supervisor also performs functions such as routing buses, acting as the school district liaison to Gadsden County’s community traffic safety team, coordinating operations and dispatch, and fielding parental complaints.

**Exhibit 9-2  
Gadsden County School District Transportation Department Organization**



Source: The Gadsden County School District.

District school buses were driven 1,257,513 miles during the 2001-02 school year, including 72,772 extracurricular activity trip miles (5.7% of the district’s total). Of the 100 buses in current service, 74 are in daily service on the district’s school bus routes, with the remaining 26 buses (21%) used as spares.<sup>1</sup> Most buses operate on two routes each morning and afternoon, typically providing transportation to an elementary school and a combined route of middle school and high school students. Coordinating multiple routes per bus with staggered school times is intended to maximize efficient use of the district’s school buses.

For the 2002–03 school year, the district employed 71 bus drivers including eight substitutes, 16 attendants, and 14 transportation employees in various other positions (including transportation supervisor).

<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the 2002-03 school year, the district had an inventory of 100 buses with 74 being used regularly and 26 considered spares. In March 2003, the Florida Department of Education recommended that Florida school districts stop using 1991 Carpenter Manufactured school buses due to structural defects. In response to this recommendation, the Gadsden County School District has taken 13 of its 100 school buses out of service. During the same month, the school district also purchased five new International Manufactured buses. Taken together, these activities resulted in the district having its inventory of 100 buses reduced to 92 buses by the end of the 2002-2003 school year. Of these 92 buses, 73 are used regularly, while 19 are used as spares.

Exhibit 9-3 presents selected student transportation data for the Gadsden County School District and five peer districts for the 2001-02 school year. The district compares favorably with its peer districts, leading in highest average bus occupancy, placing second in percentage of state funding, and placing third in student transportation expenditures as a percentage of total district expenditures.

**Exhibit 9-3  
Comparative Student Transportation Data for the Gadsden County School District  
and Five Peer Districts, School Year 2001-02**

Measure	Gadsden	Columbia	Dixie	Jackson	Jefferson	Madison	Peer Average
Square miles	518	797	701	942	609	710	752
Number of students enrolled	7,431	9,560	2,264	7,311	1,709	3,439	4,857
Number of eligible students transported	5,279	4,824	1,382	4,389	1,064	2,194	2,771
Percentage of students transported	71.03%	50.46%	61.04%	60.03%	62.23%	63.80%	57.05%
Number of buses in daily service	74	82	24	82	26	37	50
Number of miles driven	1,257,513	1,572,855	343,368	1,150,106	398,973	474,891	788,039
Student transportation expenditures	\$3,071,227	\$3,872,054	\$861,502	\$2,227,466	\$817,643	\$1,333,629	\$1,822,459
Student transportation expenditures per annual mile	\$2.14	\$1.99	\$2.37	\$1.87	\$2.05	\$2.33	\$2.12
Student transportation expenditures as a percentage of total district expenditures	5.96%	6.75%	5.85%	4.71%	6.67%	6.42%	5.98%
Average bus occupancy	72	59	59	54	41	59	55
Percentage state funding	76.66%	53.17%	71.16%	85.46%	48.89%	65.15%	64.13%
Percentage local funding	23.34%	46.83%	28.84%	14.54%	51.11%	34.85%	35.87%
Total transportation expenditures (including reported bus purchases) per student	\$573	\$799	\$620	\$504	\$768	\$601	\$658

Source: Q-Links: Florida District Transportation Profiles, July 2003 for School Year 2001-02, Florida Department of Education, and OPPAGA.

**Activities of particular interest**

The Gadsden County School District has three activities of particular interest. First, the district has implemented a computerized routing system to assist transportation staff in creating and designing efficient bus routes. Second, the district has installed live video cameras and two-way radios on all school buses to improve safety and reduce disciplinary problems. And third, the district has established arrangements with the Gadsden County Sheriff’s Department to have county prisoners periodically wash and clean all district school buses as part of district vehicle upkeep and maintenance efforts.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Summary of Conclusions for Transportation Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
<b>Planning, Organization and Staffing</b>	1. The district coordinates long-term planning and budgeting for student transportation within the context of district and community planning.	Yes	9-6
	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	9-6
	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. <sup>2</sup>	Yes	9-6
	4. The organizational structure and staffing levels of the district's transportation program minimize administrative layers and processes.	Yes	9-8
	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	9-8
	6. The district effectively and efficiently recruits and retains the bus drivers and attendants it needs.	Yes	9-8
	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	9-9
<b>Vehicle Acquisition and Maintenance</b>	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	9-10
	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	9-11
	10. The district ensures that fuel purchases are cost-effective and that school buses and other vehicles are efficiently supplied with fuel.	Yes	9-11
	11. The district maintains facilities that are conveniently situated to provide sufficient and secure support for vehicle maintenance and other transportation functions.	Yes	9-12
	12. The district maintains an inventory of parts, supplies, and equipment needed to support transportation functions that balance the concerns of immediate need and inventory costs.	Yes	9-12
<b>Operations, Management and Accountability</b>	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	9-13

<sup>2</sup>Measures of cost-efficient student transportation services include reasonably high average bus occupancy and reasonably low cost per mile and cost per student.

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
	14. The district provides efficient transportation services for exceptional students in a coordinated fashion that minimizes hardships to students.	Yes	9-14
	15. The district ensures that staff acts promptly and appropriately in response to any accidents or breakdowns.	Yes	9-15
	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	9-15
	17. The district provides appropriate technological and computer support for transportation functions and operations.	Yes	9-16
	18. The district monitors the fiscal condition of transportation functions by regularly analyzing expenditures and reviewing them against the budget.	Yes	9-17
	19. The district has reviewed the prospect for privatizing transportation functions, as a whole or in part.	Yes	9-17
	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	9-18

## PLANNING, ORGANIZATION AND STAFFING

### **Best Practice 1: Using**

#### **The district coordinates long-term planning and budgeting for student transportation within 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **Best Practice 2: Using**

#### **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.**

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. 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 can not 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could enhance its operations in two ways. First, the district should provide the school board with information on the full cost of providing transportation services to “courtesy riders” and develop criteria for determining which students qualify for services due to unsafe walking conditions. This information should be provided during the school board’s annual budget deliberations. Courtesy riders are students receiving public transportation services even though they are not eligible due to residing less than two miles from their respective schools. Transporting ineligible students incurs the same costs and obligations as transporting eligible students, but the district must pay all costs.<sup>3</sup> District policy limits transportation services to students living two miles or more from schools unless certain conditions are met, and the school board approves providing the service.<sup>4</sup> During the 2002-2003 school year, the district provided public transportation to approximately 850 ineligible students.<sup>5</sup> District transportation officials report that most of these students are elementary school students living in housing projects in close proximity of their respective schools. But they also report that some students are receiving these services due to unsafe walking conditions such as having to cross Highway 90. Our review of district student transportation policy found that the district currently does not have criteria for determining which students qualify for transportation service due to unsafe walking conditions. Given public safety concerns, the district should develop an unsafe walking condition checklist or criteria to better substantiate the use of public transportation services for ineligible students.<sup>6</sup>

During our exit interviews with district officials, we were informed that the Gadsden County School Board has recently directed transportation officials to begin preparing a report detailing the fiscal impact of providing public transportation to ineligible students. Although no deadline was set for completing the report, district officials expect tentative findings to be submitted near the end of the 2002-2003 school year. District efforts to identify the fiscal impact of providing transportation services to ineligible students are consistent with our recommendation regarding courtesy riders.

**We recommend that the district amend its current policy to define criteria for determining which students qualify for transportation services due to unsafe walking conditions. In addition, we recommend that the district continue efforts to identify the full cost of “courtesy rider” transportation services to the school board and present its information during the board’s annual budget deliberations.**

The second way in which the district could enhance its operations is by recording the dates when transportation department officials respond to suggestions and concerns regarding bus driver performance. In our review of district complaint and suggestion records, we found that most of the records did not identify when transportation management responded to suggestions or complaints from school staff, parents, or the general public concerning bus driver performance.<sup>7</sup> Aspects of driver

<sup>3</sup>Students who live two miles or more away from their schools are eligible for state funded school transportation.

<sup>4</sup> Students who reside within the two miles of their designated school may be eligible to ride the school bus under the following conditions: 1) special authorization is granted by the school board, and 2) an exceptional student not requiring special care may ride a school bus regardless of distance from home to school upon furnishing a statement from the director of Exceptional Students or designee certifying that the student is handicapped and is unable to walk to school.

<sup>5</sup> Based on data presented by the transportation supervisor to the Gadsden County School Board on May 27, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> *Q-Link: Florida School District Transportation Profiles, School Year 2001-02*, Department of Transportation and discussions with Florida Department of Education officials found that none of the roads used for student transportation services in Gadsden County currently meet the state criteria for hazardous walking conditions.

<sup>7</sup> To determine the extent to which the district is promptly responding to public suggestions and complaints regarding bus driver performance, we reviewed 18 entries of suggestions and complaints that have been recorded by transportation management between September 2000 and



performance can include driving skills, timeliness, and ability to maintain discipline on buses. Leaving out response dates makes it difficult to determine if the district is answering public inquiries in a timely manner.

**We recommend that transportation department officials record dates when they have responded to complaints or suggestions from parents and the general public regarding bus driver performance. Without this information, it cannot be determined if the district is responding in a timely manner to public concerns, complaints or suggestions.**

### **Best Practice 4: Using**

**The organizational structure and staffing levels of the district’s transportation program minimize administrative layers and processes.**

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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **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 Gadsden County School District has a process in place to meet the intent of this practice.

### **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

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March 2003. In our review, we found it difficult to determine when transportation officials had responded to 17 suggestions or complaints. The remaining entry was considered a same day response.

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.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could enhance its operations by conducting formal exit interviews with former employees and assessing turnover of drivers and attendants, and using this information to make changes to practices as necessary to retain drivers and effectively recruit replacements. The transportation department experiences a turnover of only about four bus drivers per school year, but the lack of an exit interview and evaluation of turnover makes it difficult to accurately determine the factors that are causing bus drivers to leave district employment.

**We recommend that the district conduct formal exit interviews with former employees and assess turnover of drivers and attendants to improve retention of drivers and more effectively recruit replacements.**

## **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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this practice.

## VEHICLE ACQUISITION AND MAINTENANCE

### Best Practice 8: Using

**The 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.**

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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place that meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could enhance its operations in two ways. First, the district should establish a policy addressing cost-effective replacement of buses and other vehicles. Each school year, transportation management presents district budget officials with a list of buses needing replacement. These vehicles are identified based on their day-to-day performance, maintenance cost, and age.<sup>8</sup> However, the district does not have a formal district policy outlining life cycles and criteria for replacing buses and other fleet vehicles. Establishing such a policy would ensure periodic replacement of older vehicles, which can become unreliable and generally are more costly to maintain than newer vehicles.

**We recommend that the district establish a policy addressing cost-effective replacement of buses and other district vehicles.**

Second, the district should maintain up-to-date and complete records on the types of vehicles that make up its fleet inventory.<sup>9</sup> The district currently maintains all vehicle data on its computerized fleet maintenance system, including vehicle mileage, fuel and oil disbursements, work-order and repair histories, and inspection timetables and dates. However, data generated by the maintenance system shows that transportation management has not input information to designate whether buses are currently being used as “spare” vehicles. Presently, such determination is made manually. Lack of updated and completed fleet information makes it difficult to determine the extent to which the department has more buses in its inventory than necessary. Excess buses result in unnecessary maintenance and inspection costs. An OPPAGA needs assessment found that the district does not currently have more school buses than necessary.

<sup>8</sup> Review of Department of Transportation data for School Years 2000-01 and 2001-02 found that buses recommended for replacement were at least 12 years old and/or had at least 100,000 miles on them. Of the 92 buses that currently make up the district’s fleet for School Year 2002-03, only 8% are more than 12 years old.

<sup>9</sup> At the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year, the district had an inventory of 100 buses with 74 being used regularly and 26 considered spares. In March of 2003, the Florida Department of Education recommended that Florida school districts stop using 1991 Carpenter Manufactured school buses due to structural defects. In response to this recommendation, the Gadsden County School District has taken 13 of its 100 school buses out of service. During the same month, the school district also purchased five new International Manufactured buses. Taken together, these activities resulted in the district having its inventory of 100 buses reduced to 92 buses by the end of the 2002-03 school year. Of these 92 buses, 73 are used regularly while 19 are used as spares.

**We recommend that the district maintain updated and complete records in its computerized fleet maintenance system on the types of vehicles in its fleet.**

### **Best Practice 9: Using**

**The district provides timely routine servicing for buses and other district 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could enhance its operations by developing guidelines to assist its transportation staff in making cost-effective decisions about whether to make complex or expensive repairs on older vehicles. Transportation officials currently make such decisions based on assessing the value of the vehicle versus the life cycle maintenance costs of the vehicle. Establishing guidelines would ensure that the district is making appropriate decisions regarding complex or expensive repairs on older vehicles.

**We recommend that the district establish guidelines to assist in making cost-effective decisions about whether to make complex or expensive repairs on older vehicles.**

### **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 to 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

## Best Practice 11: Using

**The district maintains facilities that are conveniently situated to provide sufficient and secure support for vehicle maintenance.**

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).

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could enhance its operations in two ways. First, the district should establish written procedures for the handling of hazardous wastes. Transportation department staff currently take steps to control and minimize the generation of hazardous wastes. However, these procedures are not presently within a district guidebook to ensure compliance with state and federal hazardous waste regulations. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection publishes documents that educate and assist businesses and government agencies in the proper handling of hazardous waste material.

**We recommend that the district develop written procedures to ensure proper handling of hazardous waste.**

Second, the district should annually prepare cost-benefit data and identify circumstances under which drivers may park vehicles at their homes during the school year. During the 2001-02 school year, the district permitted 42 of the district's 100 buses to be maintained at bus driver homes rather than the district transportation compound. However, transportation officials do not have an established formal policy and fiscal analysis addressing circumstances under which this is a cost-effective practice for the district. Cost-benefit analysis would provide data to determine if maintaining buses at driver residences is in the best financial interest of the district.

**We recommend that the district annually conduct cost-benefit analysis of all buses maintained at driver residences rather than the transportation compound.**

## Best Practice 12: Using

**The district maintains an inventory of parts, supplies, and equipment needed to support transportation functions that balance the concerns of immediate need and inventory costs.**

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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

## **OPERATIONS, MANAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **Best Practice 13: Using**

**The district ensures that any unexpected contingencies affecting vehicle operations 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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could enhance its operations in three ways. First, the district should revise its bus driver handbook to include its current procedures for responding to vehicle breakdowns. To effectively respond to vehicle breakdowns, transportation managers have installed two-way radios on all district school buses. In a discussion group with a sample of bus drivers and attendants, all knew the procedure that should be followed when a breakdown occurs, including contacting the department radio staff for assistance. Members of the group said that these procedures are usually covered during periodic department training sessions and other staff meetings. However, this information is not included in the district bus driver handbook for immediate reference.<sup>10</sup>

**We recommend that the district include procedures for responding to vehicle breakdowns in its bus driver guidebook. These procedures should address the roles and responsibility of bus drivers, operations staff, vehicle maintenance staff and school site staff. Copies of these procedures should be maintained on each district vehicle.**

The second way in which the district could enhance its operations is to collect data on the number of students who ride buses longer than the state recommended ride time standards. The state currently

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<sup>10</sup> District procedures for responding to vehicle breakdowns should make it clear who should be notified and when. In addition, district procedures should address the roles and responsibilities of bus drivers, operations employees, vehicle maintenance employees, and school site employees.

recommends that elementary school students ride buses no more than 50 minutes and that middle and high school students ride buses no more than 60 minutes. Currently, the district's transportation department collects data reflecting the location of bus stops, the distances between bus stops, and the names of students assigned to buses. However, the district does not collect data on the amount of time elementary, middle, and high school students are spending traveling from assigned bus stops to school destinations. Lack of ride time data makes it difficult to determine the extent to which children are riding beyond established limits. By compiling ride time data, the district could develop strategies and take steps to minimize these numbers whenever possible.

**We recommend that the district collect data to identify the number of students riding longer than the state recommended ride time standards, and take action to minimize this number when possible.**

Third, the district could enhance its operations by recovering full cost for its student transportation services to district athletic events. The district currently charges schools \$6.50 per hour to cover driver cost and \$0.75 per mile to contribute towards fuel and other maintenance costs.<sup>11</sup> Our review of department field trip logs found that schools requesting transportation services are typically paying for the driver, but not for the mileage. In addition our discussions with the district transportation supervisor found that the current mileage rate is significantly outdated and should be increased from \$0.75 to \$1.20 to better recover cost. Recovering full cost would increase school accountability and better reflect the fiscal impact of school sponsored field trips on the transportation department. During the 2001-02 school year, Gadsden County schools requested 72,772 in activity trip miles. If the district charged a mileage rate of \$1.20, the transportation department could expect a fund transfer of \$436,632 from schools to the transportation department over a five-year period.<sup>12</sup>

**To better recover costs, we recommend that the district take steps to receive full cost for transportation services from schools requesting educational, extracurricular, and athletic activity trips, and charge a mileage rate of \$1.20 for its field trips. Over a five-year period, implementing these recommendations would result in a fund transfer of \$436,632 from schools to the transportation department.**

## Best Practice 14: Using

**The district provides efficient transportation services for exceptional students in a coordinated fashion that minimizes hardships to students, but could enhance its operations by establishing a policy to ensure that exceptional students ride a regular bus whenever possible and seeking Medicaid reimbursement to off-set costs for transporting exceptional 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).<sup>13</sup> While necessary, these 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 them for transport. To ensure their compliance with law while controlling costs, school districts need effective systems for determining ESE students' need for

<sup>11</sup> Based on discussions with the transportation department supervisor, the current rate of \$6.50 for bus driver cost for field trips is significantly outdated and is based on negotiations between the Gadsden County School District and the school district union.

<sup>12</sup> Based on the 72,772 activity miles for school year 2001-02, a mileage rate of \$1.20 would result in an annual fund transfer of \$87,326. Over five years, the transfer would equal \$436,632.

<sup>13</sup> The ESE population in a school includes gifted students, slow learners, emotionally handicapped students, and physically handicapped students.

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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could enhance its operations by claiming Medicaid reimbursement to offset costs for transporting exceptional students. During the 2001-02 school year, 30 of the district's 1,000 exceptional student qualified for specialized transportation. The district estimates that it could receive approximately \$10,800 per year in reimbursement for transporting exceptional students. Over a five-year period, the district could generate approximately \$54,000 in revenue from Medicaid reimbursement for transporting exceptional students.<sup>14</sup>

**We recommend that the district seek Medicaid reimbursement to offset costs for transporting exceptional students. The district estimates that it could receive approximately \$10,800 annually in reimbursement for transporting exceptional students. Over a five-year period, this would result in revenue of \$54,000 for the district.**

### **Best Practice 15: Using**

**The district ensures that transportation staff acts promptly and appropriately in response to any accidents or breakdowns.**

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 activities are carried out in a safe, efficient and effective manner; proper officials are notified; and they comply with federal and state laws.<sup>15</sup>

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice.

### **Best Practice 16: Using**

**The district takes steps to ensure appropriate student behavior is maintained on the buses, 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

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<sup>14</sup> Annual Medicaid reimbursement of \$10,800 multiplied by five years equals \$54,000.

<sup>15</sup> 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.



maintaining student bus discipline by informing them of what disciplinary actions are taking place in response to written disciplinary referrals.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. The district currently has a policy requiring that students and/or parents pay restitution for student damages to buses. In addition, it has installed video cameras on all buses to reduce disciplinary problems. For the 2002-03 school year, the district had recorded 161 disciplinary referrals involving student misconduct on buses. This is an improvement over the previous school year in which the district experienced 354 referrals.

However, the district could improve its operations in two ways. One, the district should consistently record repair cost related to student damages to school buses. Discussions with transportation staff revealed that they do not always enter repair costs due to student damages to buses in the department's computerized fleet maintenance system. Second, the district should consistently record monies paid by students and/or parents in response to student damages to buses. Discussions with district budget and finance officials revealed that presently the district's budget data does not differentiate between restitutions paid due to student damages to buses and restitutions paid due to student damages to school facilities. Lack of consistently recording repair cost and differentiating restitution payments makes it difficult to determine how well the district is enforcing its disciplinary policies and holding students and parents accountable for student damages to district school buses.

**We recommend that the district consistently record repair costs due to student damages to school buses. In addition, we recommend that the district consistently record restitution payments collected from students and/or parents due to student damages to school buses.**

## **Best Practice 17: Using**

### **The district provides appropriate technological and computer support for transportation functions and operations.**

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 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.

The Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could enhance its operations by making two changes. First, the district should use its computer management systems to record, track and maintain data on transportation department training and certification, medical examinations, substance abuse testing, and personnel performance. Presently, this data is maintained in each department employee's personnel records and must be retrieved manually. Using the computer system would enable the transportation department to function more efficiently.

Second, the district could enhance its operations by periodically having transportation staff and district information technology staff jointly review its current level of technological and computer support systems to identify student transportation service needs and issues. Discussions with staff in both departments revealed that there is a need for greater communication between the units to ensure adequate computer support of student transportation services in the future.

**We recommend that the district use its computer management system to record and track information on transportation department training and certification, medical examination, substance abuse and personnel performance. In addition, we recommend that the district periodically review its current level of technological and computer support systems to identify student transportation issues and needs for the future, and ensure coordination with other systems.**

### **Best Practice 18: Using**

**The district monitors the fiscal condition of transportation functions by regularly analyzing expenditures and reviewing them against the budget, but administrators do not respond promptly to cost control issues raised during annual reviews.**

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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could enhance its operations by promptly responding to cost control issues raised during its annual budget reviews. Issues currently affecting the fiscal condition of the transportation department include recovering full cost for transportation services at athletic events, seeking restitution from students and/or parents of students who vandalize school buses, and seeking Medicaid reimbursement to offset the cost of transportation of exceptional education students.<sup>16</sup> Addressing these and other cost control issues would financially benefit the district. Failing to control costs can result in wide variances between actual and budgeted district expenditures. Exceeding budgets may require the district to reduce funds to the classroom, forgo other needs, or to dip into reserves to meet unanticipated expenses.

**We recommend that the district promptly respond to cost control issues that are raised during its annual budget reviews.**

### **Best Practice 19: Using**

**The district has reviewed the prospect for privatizing transportation functions, as a whole or in part, but does not conduct quality assurance checks of functions performed by private vendors.**

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

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<sup>16</sup> In our review of department field trip logs, we found that schools requesting transportation services are paying enough to cover driver cost, but not mileage. Monies paid for mileage are used to contribute towards fuel, oil and other maintenance costs. In our discussions with transportation department staff and district budget and finance officials, we found that district transportation staff do not always enter repair cost due to student damages to buses in the department's computerized fleet maintenance system and the district's budget data does not differentiate between restitutions paid due to student damages to buses and restitutions paid due to student damages to school facilities as it should. In our research we also found that the district currently does not claim Medicaid reimbursement to off-set costs for transporting exceptional students. The district estimates that it could receive approximately \$10,800 per year in reimbursement for transporting exceptional students.

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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. However, the district could enhance its operations in two ways. First, the district should conduct quality assurance checks on transportation functions performed by private vendors. The transportation department currently contracts out vehicle maintenance functions such as installing windshields, rebuilding transmissions, and rethreading tires. The department has also contracted out for major body work. Quality assurance reviews would serve to ensure that these functions were conducted in accordance with original agreements.

**We recommend that the district conduct quality assurance checks on transportation functions performed by private vendors.**

Second, the district should develop key unit cost information for student transportation functions to enable employees to make cost comparisons with private providers. Presently, transportation department employees informally compare their own costs with those of private vendors to identify maintenance activities that can be performed at lower cost elsewhere. Unit cost information would help ensure that employees are making an accurate full cost comparison to similar services.

**We recommend the district develop key unit cost information for student transportation functions so that administrators can make accurate cost comparisons with private providers.**

## **Best Practice 20: Not Using**

**The district has not established an accountability system for transportation services, but has complied with applicable provisions of the Safe Passage Act.**

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. Districts 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.

The Gadsden County School District is not using this best practice because it has not established an accountability system for transportation services and activities. The district should develop a set of measures that allows managers to routinely monitor and evaluate student transportation performance. The measurement set should include both short-term internal measures to evaluate day-to-day transportation operations, such as driver absence rates, and long-term measures for major aspects of the transportation department, such as the operating costs per student, the age of its fleet, and the timeliness of service provided. The transportation department should also use the performance information to provide district management and the board with an annual report summarizing program results.

Action Plan 3-1 in Chapter 3 provides a mechanism to help the district evaluate performance and enhance its performance accountability system.

# 10

## Food Service Operations

### *Summary*

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The Gadsden County School District is using 6 of the 11 food service operations best practices. The district is doing well in the areas of organizational relationships, training, operational procedures, self-inspection system, compliance with state, federal, and district policies, and interaction with customers. To meet the remaining best practice standards and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its food service program, the district needs to improve its planning and budgeting process, take a more proactive role in management of assets of the program, develop an improved performance measurement system, and use the performance management system to report on program performance and as a basis for managing the program.



As seen in Exhibit 10-1, the district has several opportunities to reduce costs and increase revenues in the food service 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**

#### **Our Review Identified Several Ways the District Could Reduce Costs and Increase Revenues in the Area of Food Service Operations**

Best Practice Number	Fiscal Impact: Increased Gross Margin, Savings, and (Investments)					Total
	Year 2002-03	Year 2003-04	Year 2004-05	Year 2005-06	Year 2006-07	
6 Expand use of USDA Donated Food processors	\$14,000	\$14,000	\$14,000	\$14,000	\$14,000	\$70,000
6 Increase availability of a la carte items	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000	60,000
6 Convert to "Offer Versus Serve" method on serving lines	15,000	30,000	45,000	60,000	75,000	225,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$41,000</b>	<b>\$56,000</b>	<b>\$71,000</b>	<b>\$86,000</b>	<b>\$101,000</b>	<b>\$355,000</b>

# Background

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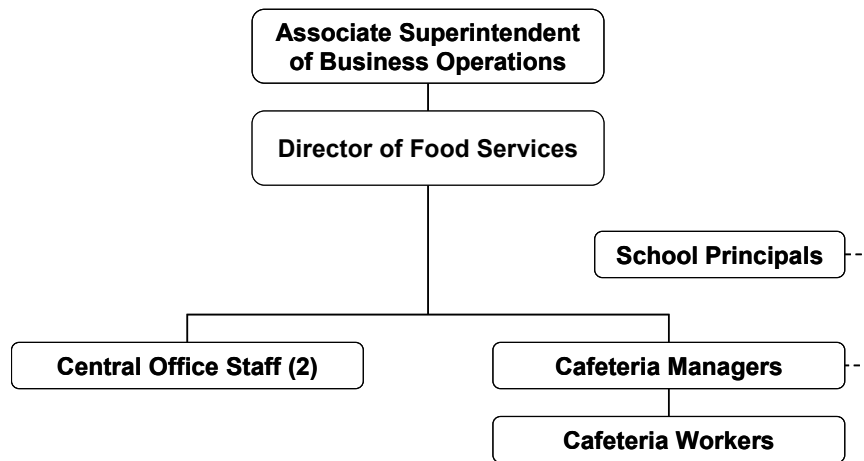
The Gadsden County School District’s food service program provided approximately 1,383,000 meals during 2001-02 school year. In doing so, the program produced approximately 429,000 breakfasts, 900,000 lunches, and sold the equivalent of 54,000 meals in the form of a la carte items. The program provided meal service at 18 sites. The food service budget for 2002-03 school year was approximately \$3.5 million.

## Program organization

The district’s food service director oversees all aspects of the food service program. Principals and the food service director share in the management of food service staff on-site at each school. The current food service director has been overseeing the program for three years.

The program lines of authority are similar to most small district food service operations. As shown below in Exhibit 10-2, the director works directly for the district’s financial and business manager and directly oversees all of the cafeteria managers. District-level food program staff is minimal, with the director, a computer operator, and a secretary/fiscal assistant to perform all district level program duties. The program directly employs a combination of 90 full-time and part-time food service program staff. In addition, the program funds two staff members at the central warehouse of the maintenance department that support the program. As part of their duties they routinely assisting in the receiving, warehousing, and delivery of some supplies, some purchased food, and all USDA Donated Food items to school sites.

**Exhibit 10-2**  
**The Food Service Director Oversees 18 Cafeteria Managers**



Source: Gadsden County School District.

## National School Lunch Program participation

The district participates in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and National Breakfast 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 the food service department share local responsibility for program administration within the district and compliance with state and federal rules.

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 either \$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, Gadsden County receives the \$0.22 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 Gadsden County School District has opted to offer breakfast free to all elementary, 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
<b>Elementary Schools—Gadsden County</b>			
Full price paid			
Breakfast	\$0.22	\$0 (Free)	\$0.22
Lunch	0.22	1.00	1.22 <sup>1</sup>
Reduced price			
Breakfast	\$0.22 + \$0.65	\$0 (Free)	\$0.87 <sup>2</sup>
Lunch	\$0.22 + \$1.54	0.40	2.16 <sup>1</sup>
Free			
Breakfast	\$0.22 + \$0.95	\$0	\$1.17 <sup>2</sup>
Lunch	\$0.22 + \$1.94	0	2.16 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Middle and High Schools—Gadsden County</b>			
Full price paid			
Breakfast	\$0.22	\$0 (Free)	\$0.22
Lunch	\$0.22	\$1.25	\$1.47 <sup>1</sup>
Reduced price			
Breakfast	\$0.22 + \$0.65	\$0 (Free)	\$0.87 <sup>2</sup>
Lunch	\$0.22 + \$1.54	\$0.40	\$2.16 <sup>1</sup>
Free			
Breakfast	\$0.22 + \$0.95	\$0.00	\$1.17 <sup>2</sup>
Lunch	\$0.22 + \$1.94	\$0.00	\$2.16 <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In addition, the state quarterly pays partial matching funds to the district. For School Year 2001-02 this equaled about \$0.03 per lunch served.

<sup>2</sup> For individual schools classified as “severe need,” the federal program provides an additional \$0.23.

Source: United States Department of Agriculture and Florida Department of Education.

As Exhibit 10-4 illustrates, Gadsden County’s food service program account balance has increased over the past three years. However, inventory value has recently accounted for the majority (nearly 80%) of the program’s fund balance at year-end. Thus, the amount of cash available from the increasing fund balance has remained a small portion, which has limited the opportunity for investment in the program. Typical for school food programs, participation in the federal National School Lunch Program and cash

## Food Service Operations

food sales account for the majority of revenue, while food costs, salaries, and benefits represent the majority of expenditures.

### Exhibit 10-4 The Gadsden Food Service Program Has Operated With a Small Cash Reserve Over the Last Three Years

	Fiscal Year			
	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02
<b>Revenue</b>				
<b>Food Sales Revenue</b>				
Federal Meals Program	\$2,749,530	\$2,740,906	\$2,504,361	\$2,756,761
State Supplement	118,736	112,974	110,292	110,732
Meal Sales	252,610	270,812	392,309	250,810
A La Carte Sales	196,092	146,840	----- <sup>1</sup>	108,303
Other Food Sales	36,167	-----	-----	28,988
<b>Other Revenue</b>				
USDA Donated Food	303,760	238,886	236,993	393,296
Interest	902	32	76	30
Other Revenue	18,131	-----	67,483	-----
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$3,675,928</b>	<b>\$3,510,450</b>	<b>\$3,311,514</b>	<b>\$3,648,920</b>
<b>Expenditures</b>				
Salaries	\$1,221,542	\$1,179,731	\$1,217,440	\$1,268,169
Employee Benefits	476,955	365,940	402,626	382,275
Purchased Services	38,270	36,641	43,185	76,641
Energy Services	7,011	10,009	14,321	18,661
Material and supplies	1,612,182	1,706,068	1,569,528	1,654,042
Capital Outlay	68,690	4,954	1,272	10,034
Other Expenses	2,805	106,975	71,522	64,312
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>3,427,455</b>	<b>\$3,410,318</b>	<b>\$3,319,894</b>	<b>\$3,474,134</b>
Net Income (Loss)	<b>248,473</b>	<b>100,132</b>	<b>(8,380)</b>	<b>174,786</b>
<b>Account Balance</b>	<b>\$269,277</b>	<b>\$369,409</b>	<b>\$361,029</b>	<b>\$535,815</b>

<sup>1</sup> For Fiscal Year 2000-01, a la carte sales were combined and reported as part of meal sales.

Source: Gadsden County School District.

## Peer districts used for comparison

To evaluate the Gadsden County School District food service program, we compared food operations in this district to a set of similar, or peer, districts. Through an analysis process conducted by OPPAGA and approved by the Gadsden School District, the five districts selected were Columbia, Dixie, Jackson, Jefferson, and Madison counties. As shown in Exhibit 10-5, the Gadsden County food service program is serving more meals per student than its peers and has a higher ratio of free and reduced price eligible students.



**Exhibit 10-5**

**The Gadsden County Food Service Program Had a Higher Ratio of Free and Reduced Eligibility Than Peer Districts During Fiscal Year 2002-03**

District	Student Population <sup>1</sup>	Total Sites in District Serving NSLP Lunch Meals	Total NSLP Claimed Lunch Meals	Meals Served per Student for the Year	Free and Reduced Eligibility Percentage (Elementary) <sup>2</sup>
Gadsden	6,584	18	844,271	128	83.5%
Jefferson	1,516	3	201,207	133	81.6%
Madison	3,298	5	356,408	108	79.2%
Dixie	2,160	4	257,049	119	71.3%
Columbia	9,545	15	913,864	96	61.3%
Jackson	6,923	17	664,087	96	61.3%

<sup>1</sup> Unweighted FTE, all programs. Used as the best measure of student available to participate in the food service program.

<sup>2</sup> Fiscal Year 2001-02 data, which is the most recent information available from FDOE.

Source: Florida Department of Education data sources.

# Conclusion and Recommendations

## Summary of Conclusions for Food Service Operations Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
<b>Planning, Organization, and Staffing</b>	1. The program has developed strategic or operational plans that are consistent with district plans and the program budget, and approved by the district.	No	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.	Yes	10-8
	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
<b>Management</b>	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
<b>Performance and Accountability</b>	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	10-14
	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	10-15
	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.	No	10-16
	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	10-17

# PLANNING, ORGANIZING, AND STAFFING

## Best Practice 1: Not Using

**The food service program has developed strategic or operational plans that are generally consistent with district plans and the program budget, but has not established objectives, strategies, and assessments of performance.**

A well managed 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 by size of the district. 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 Gadsden County School District food service director has been involved in the design of the kitchen for the new East Gadsden High School currently under construction. The food services program has a limited plan that is generally consistent with the district's strategic plan.

However, the district can improve overall operations and meet best practice standards by addressing two issues. First, the program has not established objectives that state how the program will attain its goals. The program has a School Food Service Goals and Objectives document that contains a mission statement and two goals. The program's stated goals are consistent with the district strategic plan, but are broadly stated and do not include strategies or timeframes for how the goals will be achieved. For example, one of the goals is *"to administer the food service program in an effective and efficient manner to meet nutritional needs and program acceptability for students and staff in accordance with federal, state, and local guidelines."* However, the document does not indicate what strategy the program will use to achieve this goal, a timeframe within which the program plans to meet the goal, or what benchmarks management will use to assess whether it has achieved the objectives

To improve its operations, the program should develop measurable objectives and strategies for reaching program goals. Action plan 3-1 in Chapter 3 provides a mechanism to address this issue.

Second, the district also can improve its operations by establishing school level food service budgets. As discussed in Best Practice 7 of this chapter, limited collection and analysis of performance information has restricted program managers' ability to make informed decisions within time to influence results. Similarly, not developing school-level operating budget information significantly hinders management's ability to set quantifiable program goals in order to measure and monitor operational results at key times during the school year. At a minimum, such budget information should include the cost of labor, food, commodities, and supplies. These costs are the most variable, are readily influenced by management action, and can significantly influence the financial success of the program.

Action Plan 10-1 includes recommendations to address this second issue.

**Action Plan 10-1**

<b>We recommend that food service program monthly budgets be developed at school level.</b>		
Action Needed	Step 1.	The food service director, cafeteria managers, and district finance staff should work together to develop a monthly budget at the school level. Prior financial statements at school level should be used as a starting point.
	Step 2.	The food service director should refine the budgets annually and link budget forecasts to annual program goals.
	Step 3.	Program management should monitor budgets versus financial performance at least quarterly and analyze reasons for variations.
Who Is Responsible	Food service director and district finance staff	
Time Frame	July 2004	

**Best Practice 2: Using**

**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.**

For the food service program to function well, the district food service manager, 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.

Although the Gadsden County School District is using this best practice, there is one area in which the district can enhance its operations. The food service director would benefit from assistance in dealing with day-to-day troubleshooting at the schools and routine program tasks such as school cafeteria inspections and procurement activities. The director currently deals with operational issues and problems at the school level that consume much of her time and hinder her ability to focus on program management issues, such as plans, budgets, overall cafeteria operations, and staffing. The director’s time and talents are being diverted and consumed by details at the school level and larger issues such as cost-saving opportunities and expanding operations may be allotted little attention. The food service director has been given the responsibility and authority to manage the program, but the 18-site span of control is approaching the reasonable maximum. The district may be able to initially add part-time assistance to the district staff to aid in overseeing day-to-day program operations at the school level. If the added position is limited to part-time, increased program efficiencies should offset any additional costs.

**We recommend that the district consider adding a part-time food service technician to the program to assist the director in dealing with day-to-day troubleshooting at the schools and routine program oversight and tasks.**

**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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. Program management provides some training directly to food service employees. Program management also provides for training through the Florida chapter of the American School Food Service Association (ASFSA). Employees attain certification through ASFSA's continuing education program, a self-study program. Thus, the district is able to take advantage of a structured school food service training program. The program also provides training through assets and materials available through of the Florida Department of Education and the US Department of Agriculture.

## **MANAGEMENT**

### **Best Practice 4: Using**

**The district has developed comprehensive procedures manuals that are kept current.**

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 Gadsden County School District policy and procedures manual is consistent with overall district policy and covers the minimal essential areas for cafeteria managers and central office staff. The manual provides a basic overview of the program and operations.

Although the district is using this best practice, there are two areas in which the district can enhance its operations. First, the district should more fully develop the food service program's procedures manual by expanding on management's intent and policy. For example, the procedures manual does not sufficiently address procedures for how delivered goods are to be received and inspected at schools. This is important to ensure accurate accountability and protection of program assets. The procedures also do not specify under what conditions there is a delegation or limitation of authority for cafeteria managers such as altering menus, reporting of accidents, and immediate treatment of injuries. With 18 food preparation and serving sites, responsibilities and authority of cafeteria managers should be clearer than stated in the current procedures manual.

**We recommend that the district review other district's procedures manuals and expand the information in its manual to include more specific direction on processes and delegation of authority for cafeteria manager responsibilities.**

Second, the warehouse manager needs better documented warehouse and delivery procedures. Although the methods used to warehouse and deliver food items to schools appear to be effective and efficient, they have not been documented in a procedures manual. The warehouse manager will be retiring within the year, and thus it is important that current comprehensive procedures be documented and made available to the new warehouse manager to ensure a smooth transition.

**We recommend that the food service director and warehouse manager work together to ensure that current, comprehensive warehouse procedures are available to the new warehouse manager.**

## **Best Practice 5: Not Using**

### **The district does not perform sound cash and account management.**

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 account 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.

The Gadsden County School District submits and receives federal reimbursements in a timely manner (within 30 days). This enhances the program's cash position. However, the district can improve overall operations and meet best practice standards by addressing three issues. First, the food service director could take a more proactive role in the financial management of the program. The program director does not periodically review the food service budget to analyze and compare the budget versus basic program information such as performance and trends of expenses and revenue.

Second, the program has not been paying for all of the assistance it receives from other district units, which effectively results in its operations being subsidized by general account funds. The program pays for gas, most repair parts, and delivery and warehousing of food items. The food service program also reimburses some program expenses paid for with general fund monies through the federal indirect rate of 3.24%. However, this rate only covers personnel and accounting services provided to the food service program. During Fiscal Year 2001-02, the program did not pay for electricity, trash removal, janitorial services in the dining area, and maintenance labor expenses. While it is uncommon for districts to have separate utility meters for the cafeterias or dedicated janitorial staff, districts typically use a proportional, fair share method of payment based on the square footage of a school to bill food service programs for services paid for from general funds. While the fiscal impact of this recommendation will be neutral to the district, it could represent an increase in costs to the program of approximately \$100,000 per year.<sup>1</sup> However, by allowing these program costs to be absorbed by the general fund, less district funding is available for classroom type expenses, which is the district's core mission. It also misrepresents the true cost of the program. Without full, accurate and reliable cost information the district can not ensure the

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<sup>1</sup> Estimates were rounded and based on the following assumptions. Electricity was estimated at \$20,000 per year. Labor for maintenance was based on 18 sites, assuming two visits each for three hours per visit at 25 per hour. Trash removal was based on approximate rates for Tallahassee, 18 sites operating for nine months a year, with four pickups per month at \$100 per site, of which half of the cost would be shared with schools. Janitorial services based upon 18 sites with one janitor per site working for two hours for each of 160 school meal days at \$12 per hour.

program is efficiently operated. The program and district financial staff should review each of these potential authorize expenses and come to a fair share agreement of payment or reimbursement. Once an agreed upon amount is reached, the program may need to revise its budget and financial planning to cover these expenses.

Third, the program has not developed a five-year cash flow budget for planning the use of program resources. Having a five-year cash flow budget would assist management to better plan the use of its assets in order to meet program needs and ensure future self-sufficiency. Such a plan would assist in detecting and avoiding the current situation that has limited the financial condition of the program. The program’s Fiscal Year 2001-02 ending fund balance equaled \$535,815. However, 78% of the assets were tied up in inventory leaving only a small portion in cash to begin the new school year or invest in program equipment. This small cash balance puts the district at risk of depending on periodic general fund transfers to operate the food service program, especially during the early portion of the school year.

Action Plan 10-2 includes recommendations to address these issues.

**Action Plan 10-2**

**We recommend that the food service program take a more proactive role in managing the program’s budget and financial assets.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. With assistance from the district’s financial staff, the food service director should collect, review, and analyze program data in order to develop a comprehensive food service program budget that is linked to plans and meets long term program needs. This budget should be to school level to enable appropriate management oversight. The food service director should monitor at least quarterly the financial status of each school’s operations and the financial condition of the district program as a whole and take actions as needed to meet program goals and budgets.</p> <p>Step 2. The food service director and assistant superintendent for business and finance should review procedures used to determine the program’s fair share of program expenses and develop payment methods by reimbursement to the general fund or direct charges.</p> <p>Step 3. As the annual budget is further developed, commence development and use of a five-year cash flow budget to improve mid range financial planning and program goal attainment.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Food service director and assistant superintendent for business and finance
Time Frame	July 2005

**Best Practice 6: Not Using**

**District and program managers are not optimizing program 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 to 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 Gadsden County School District takes advantage of USDA Donated Food (commodities) by ordering its full annual allocation and requesting bonus allocations. The food service director and district school board periodically review food prices to ensure that pricing of meals and a la carte items are appropriate.

However, to meet the intent of this best practice, the district needs to take several actions. First, the program could more aggressively analyze and seek to expand operations as opportunities arise. For example, management currently only uses one USDA food processor (pizza rebate program). Using food processors reduces inventory on-hand, provides for product consistency, and reduces delivery costs of USDA Donated Food. Moreover, reduced food preparation labor costs more than offset any increase in processed food costs. OPPAGA has found that aggressive use of food processors and USDA processor rebate programs reduces overall food, labor, and delivery costs by at least 5% of a district’s USDA Donated Food allocation. For the Gadsden County food service program, this would equal a savings of approximately \$14,000 per year or \$70,000 over five years.<sup>2</sup>

Second, student participation and sales have likely been affected by the relative lack of a la carte food offerings at schools. A la carte sales account for only 3.7% of total food sales as compared to higher percentages for peers. See Exhibit 10-7 for a comparison of peer a la carte sales. At one high school we visited, the a la carte items offered consisted of only juice and cookies. By expanding a la carte items, the district should be able to double or triple a la carte food sales and increase the revenue margin for the program. A la carte items are relatively profitable and by expanding selection the program should at least double sales, thereby increasing program margin by \$12,000 per year or \$60,000 over five years.<sup>3</sup>

**Exhibit 10-7  
Gadsden County Food Service A La Carte Sales  
Was Less Per Student Than Its Peers, During School Year 2000-01<sup>1</sup>**

Districts	Reported Student Population <sup>2</sup>	Lunch A La Carte Sales	Average Per Student	A La Carte Sales as a Percentage of Total Program Revenue
Gadsden	6,986	\$124,167	\$17.77	3.7%
Jefferson	1,756	\$46,046	\$26.22	6.4%
Dixie	2,235	\$85,392	\$38.21	9.0%
Madison	3,369	\$200,879	\$59.63	14.8%
Jackson	7,083	\$501,010	\$70.73	16.8%
Columbia	9,424	\$582,318	\$61.79	18.9%

<sup>1</sup> Latest state-wide program data available from the Florida Department of Education.

<sup>2</sup> Unweighted FTE students. Used as the best count of students available to participate in the food service program.

Source: Florida Department of Education.

Third, the program could decrease labor costs by implementing “offer versus serve” at middle schools and high schools. Currently, cafeteria workers at all levels of schools typically serve students rather than letting students select from food items. Program rules permit and encourage schools districts to allow students to select three or more of the five items normally offered as part of the main National School Lunch Program (NSLP) meal offering. This encourages participation by allowing choice and reduces the waste of items a child may not eat and discard. Also, the serve method used by the district requires additional staff to plate each item thereby increasing labor costs which in turn results in less efficient operations. Converting to the preferred “offer versus serve” method should save the district at least 5% in annual labor costs and benefits. Reducing staff should be done through attrition. Thus, we have conservatively estimated the saving for the first five years to be only 1% per year, but cumulative to the 5% level by the end of five years. This will result in a savings of \$15,000 the first year, \$75,000 by the

<sup>2</sup> The district average about \$295,000 in USDA donated food per year. District management reported that approximately \$8,000 per year is already processed through the pizza rebate program. Applying 5% estimated saving to the remaining approximately \$280,000 in USDA donated food allows for a conservative potential savings of approximately \$14,000 per year, or \$70,000 over five years.

<sup>3</sup> The district currently sells approximately \$125,000 in a la carte food items. It is conservative to assume a 10% margin for these items since labor will not increase. Thus, addition annual margin of \$12,000 is reasonable to attain.



fifth year, and a total savings of \$225,000 over the five-year period. Synchronizing this transition along with more pre-prepared foods and less scratch cooking should make this goal easily attainable.<sup>4</sup>

Fourth, program managers need to review the physical layout of kitchens and serving lines. For example, one school (George Munroe Elementary) serves over 800 students at lunch using one serving line. This requires cafeteria workers to serve students over a three-hour time period. This requires a complex feeding schedule that stretches over too long of a period, is inconvenient for students eating the very early or late time slots, and requires staffing of the serving line over an inefficiently lengthy time period. Enrollment at the school has risen over time, but the food service program facilities, layout, and equipment has not kept pace with the increased demands of the student population and participation. Savings suggestions provided in this best practice area alone should be able to fund renovation and upgrade of this kitchen and any other similar situations over time without relying on general account funds.

Finally, program managers do not formally assess the efficiency and effectiveness of core process functions (such areas as warehousing, delivery, procurement, and management) as well as basic practices of the program (such as the degree of scratch cooking or providing uniforms for employees) at least once every five years. The food service director currently conducts and documents required on-site school reviews of each school each year and, as needed, discusses specific problems and improvements with cafeteria managers. However, periodic reviews are necessary to affirm or reconsider past management decisions that affect program costs or employee working conditions, or result in lost opportunities for improved efficiency or effectiveness.

The program can take several steps to expand its operations and improve its financial situation as specified in Action Plan 10-3.

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<sup>4</sup> With average labor and benefit cost of about \$1.6 million per year, 1% conservatively equals about \$15,000 initial savings per year. With an additional saving of 1% more the second year, the savings would be \$30,000. An additional 1% savings for each year thereafter would result in a total savings of \$225,000 over five years.

**Action Plan 10-3**

**We recommend that the food service program take several actions to optimize its financial opportunities.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. The food service director should analyze state provided commodity processing contracts to determine optimal financial benefit for the program. Select and implement the most cost effective offerings. Especially consider full use of the pizza rebate program and chicken nugget processors to reduce Donated Food storage and delivery costs and improve customer acceptance.</p> <p>Step 2. The food service director and cafeteria managers should expand a la carte food offerings at all secondary schools to improve program acceptance and improve program financial condition.</p> <p>Step 3. Through attrition, the food service directors should phase-in the “offer versus serve” serving method in all schools and reduce or reallocate staff accordingly. The director should foresee training needs, delegate implementation to cafeteria managers, and periodically monitor implementation of this initiative.</p> <p>Step 4. The food service director and cafeteria managers should analyze the physical appearance and layouts of cafeteria kitchens and dining areas and rearrange or plan renovations of these areas to improve physical appearance and efficiency. Significant changes may need incorporation in goals, plans, and budgets of the food service program.</p> <p>Step 5. The food service director, with the assistance of the Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance, should assess the efficiency and effectiveness of core process functions and activities of the program at least every five years, and document and monitor needed improvements. Special attention should be given to direct delivery versus warehousing of purchased food, items being produced from scratch, procurement methods, providing of employee uniforms, and use of central kitchens to serve satellite schools. Significant efforts should be integrated into program budgets, goals, and strategies.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Food service director, cafeteria managers, Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance
Time Frame	July 2005 and ongoing

## PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

### Best Practice 7: Not Using

**Food service program management has not developed comprehensive performance and cost-efficiency measures that provide management with information to evaluate program performance and better manage operations.**

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, 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 occasionally 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.

However, the Gadsden County School District does not meet best practice standards because it has not developed a sufficient system of program-level or school-level performance and cost-efficiency measures to quantitatively and qualitatively evaluate its operations. Such measures would enable district managers

to evaluate program success and shortcoming to make better informed decisions regarding the use of limited resources. Program managers collect and report information on participation rates (free and reduced as a percentage of eligible and overall participation) and submit required information to the Florida Department of Education. However, program management does not collect and analyze other basic school-level data such as meals per labor hour and expense ratios such as cost of food. Nor does program management routinely collect and analyze information on program-wide measures such as overall margin or food and labor margins. Such collection and analysis should occur in a small district at least quarterly.

Program management reported that it currently uses a staffing ratio of one food service worker to 100 students as a standard to schedule workers per school. But this method is flawed since it does not take into account factors such as total sales, participation rates of students, full versus part-time employee work schedules, and the number of serving lines or limitations of an individual school. Meals per labor hour is the industry's generally accepted standard for assigning staff and evaluating efficiency at the school level. Other minimum performance measures for a small district should include labor and benefit costs as a percentage of expenditures (districtwide), food costs as a percentage of expenditures (districtwide and school level), net margin as a percentage of revenue (districtwide), and participation rates of regular and free plus reduced meals as a percentage of eligibility (school level and districtwide).

Action plan 3-1 in Chapter 3 of this report provides a mechanism to help the district evaluate performance and enhance its performance accountability system.

### **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.**

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 Gadsden County School District has processes in place to meet the intent of this best practice. The district has a system to conduct required annual inspections of meal serving sites to ensure that schools are adhering to the program policies and procedures. The food service director inspects each school cafeteria using a five-page review checklist each year and on an as-needed basis during the school year to evaluate essential areas of food service operations (e.g., sanitation, portion control, safety procedures). The visits involve discussing food service problems and improvements. The food service director is also actively involved in the procurement process and is a member of a procurement coop in conjunction with other school districts.

Although the district meets this best practice, there is one area in which the district can enhance its operations. The food service director should routinely evaluate the food service system as a whole and document and monitor the results of recommended corrective actions noted during on-site school inspections. That is, although individual schools are inspected, the program needs a collective consideration of all of the inspection results to identify problem area trends, training needs, successes that can be built upon, and program goals and objectives that should be altered.

**We recommend that the food service director develop a method to track, document, and follow-up on school-specific and general problem areas in the district and take appropriate actions to resolve problems and expand on successes.**

## **Best Practice 9: Not Using**

**District and program administrators do not have effective system of performance measures, benchmarks, and budgets in order to regularly evaluate performance of the program, report successes, and use this analysis for change.**

School district and program administrators should make 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.

The Gadsden County School District can improve overall operations and meet best practice standards by improving its collection, analysis and reporting of food service performance information. As discussed in Best Practices 1 and 7 of this chapter, the program has not developed a performance reporting system or an appropriate set of performance measures to allow it to periodically evaluate and analyze staffing allocations or use food and labor costs to monitor menu costs, trends, and production for schools. Further, under this best practice, the program does not have a system in place to periodically analyze and inform district management of program performance using these performance measures and financial information. Informing management allows for reporting of successes and an opportunity to make recommendations for program and district improvements.

Program management should refine performance measures, periodically review budgets and cost data for trends and needed change. At least annually, program management should also provide performance reports to the superintendent, school board, and key district management. Action Plan 3-1 in Chapter 3 of the report includes the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

## **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 Gadsden County School District is meeting this best practice. The district has passed its last Coordinated Review Effort, School Meals Initiative Review, and USDA Donated Foods inspection. The district's and program's food service policies regarding competitive items and certain beverages, such as carbonated soda, are in compliance with state and federal guidelines.

## **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, but improvements could occur.**

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.

Although the Gadsden County School District is meeting this best practice, the district could enhance its operations by addressing two issues. First, the district could improve how the program obtains stakeholder input. At Shanks High School, a suggestion box system was implemented to solicit complaints and suggestions from students. The principal reports that the system has worked well and has resulted in changes being made. However, program managers could do more to identify barriers to student participation or overcome them. Program managers could develop a simple, yet documented system for all schools for receiving complaints/suggestions or conducting outreach to stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, and principals, to solicit comments or ideas. Participants in a public forum conducted by OPPAGA reported that parents and students have not been asked to provide input about program problems or needed improvements. Stakeholder feedback can be an important source of information to help improve student participation.

Second, our team identified some barriers to participation during our school site visits, public forum meeting, principal focus group, and interviews with the food service staff members. For example, cafeteria kitchen and dining area appearance could likely be made more pleasant and appealing. Students and school staff are often eager to assist in planning and even assist in such improvements. Many districts develop themes for dining areas or make use of school mascots or programs to link the food program to student activities. Students today are accustomed to a variety of and more frequent visits to commercial food establishments, and are developing more discerning tastes and high expectations for dining areas. Increased program revenue opportunities provided in this chapter should be able to assist in this area.

**The food service director should develop a system for actively soliciting and gathering customer feedback. The system could include regular surveys of students, parents, and school staff members.**

# 11

## Cost Control Systems

### *Summary*

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The Gadsden County School District is using 13 of the 22 Cost Control Systems Best Practices. To meet the remaining best practice standards and enhance the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its cost control systems, the district should establish written procedures that promote ethical financial management practices and provide for confidential reporting of suspected improprieties, develop procedures to timely resolve findings noted in external audits and other monitoring reviews, develop a strategic plan that includes measurable financial goals and link the plan objectives to its annual budget, conduct annual risk assessments, strengthen internal controls over tangible personal property, and document the cost effectiveness of its current warehouse function in relation to alternative inventory services such as direct purchases using a purchasing card program or outsourcing the warehouse function.

### *Auditor General's Scope, Objectives, and Methodology for Cost Controls*

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Pursuant to s. 1008.35, *Florida Statutes*, the Auditor General assists the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) in examining district operations to determine whether they meet best financial management practices. The Auditor General provides this assistance by performing the review of the cost control systems area (one of ten areas) as defined in s. 1008.35(2)(j), *Florida Statutes*. We conducted the best practices review of the Gadsden County School District's cost control systems in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards as they apply to performance audits. We reviewed cost control systems in the areas of financial management, internal controls, external and internal auditing, cash management, capital asset management, debt management, risk management, purchasing, and inventory management. We reviewed the district's operations relating to cost control systems primarily for the 2001-02 fiscal year and gathered information by using the following methods:

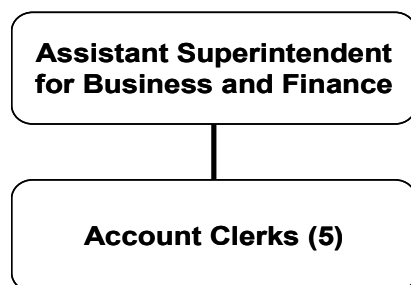
- Reviewed and tested compliance with state laws and rules applicable to cost control systems.
- Examined and tested compliance with district policies and procedures applicable to cost control systems.
- Reviewed district prepared preliminary survey documents regarding best practice standards and indicators applicable to cost control systems.
- Examined operational reports and records as they relate to cost control systems.
- Interviewed district officials and employees.
- Reviewed other financial and compliance related audits and monitoring reviews of the district.

## Background

The Gadsden County School District’s cost control activities are primarily managed by the finance function. Operational units of the finance function include general accounting, accounts payable, food service accounting, etc. The finance function consists of one administrative staff and five account clerks. The finance function’s budget for the 2001-02 fiscal year was \$342,644.74.

Finance and accounting functions are centralized. The current assistant superintendent for business and finance (ASBF) has been with the district for 16 years and has been assigned the ASBF position for the last 14 years. Three account clerks, each with over 15 years experience, and two account clerks, each with less than a year’s experience, assist the ASBF. In April 2001, the board approved an additional account clerk position; however, the position is currently vacant.

### Exhibit 11-1 Organizational Structure of the Finance Department



Source: Gadsden County School District.

The district uses governmental accounting to report its financial position and results of operations. Governmental accounting segregates 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 (agency funds). Substantially all of the district’s resources are accounted for in the governmental funds. Exhibit 11-2 shows that the district reported revenues of \$65.5 million in its governmental funds during the 2001-02 fiscal year.

### Exhibit 11-2 Governmental Funds Revenues—2001-02 Fiscal Year

General Fund	Special Revenue Funds	Debt Service Funds	Capital Projects Funds	Total
\$39,090,435	\$13,865,512	\$256,967	\$12,310,363	\$65,523,277

Source: Audited Financial Statements.

Certain governmental funds account for non-operating activities of the district. For example, 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.

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 11-3 shows federal, state, and local sources reported in the general fund for the 2001-02 fiscal year.

**Exhibit 11-3  
General Fund Revenues—2001-02 Fiscal Year**

Federal	State	Local	Total
\$673,433	\$32,093,044	\$6,323,958	\$39,090,435

Source: Audited Financial Statements.

The state provided over 82 percent of the district’s general fund resources during the 2001-02 fiscal year. Four sources administered by the Florida Department of Education comprise the majority of state revenue accounted for in the district’s general fund. First is the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) funding which is used for current operations. Second is resources provided for categorical education programs which are earmarked for certain programs such as supplemental academic instruction, instructional materials, and transportation. Third is workforce development funds used for adult and other vocational educational services. Fourth is lottery funds earmarked for educational enhancement and school advisory council activities.

Local revenues are primarily generated from ad valorem (property) taxes and represent 13 percent of the district’s general fund resources.

As is characteristic of governmental accounting, the district presents expenditures by character or functional purpose. Within the governmental funds, functional expenditures are segregated into current and non-current capital outlay and debt service categories. General fund current expenditures comprise the largest portion, representing approximately 62 percent of the total 2001-02 fiscal year governmental funds expenditures. Current expenditures are broken down into four major functional classifications; instruction, instructional support services, general support services, and fixed capital outlay. Exhibit 11-4 shows general fund current expenditures on a functional basis.

**Exhibit 11-4  
General Fund Current Functional Expenditures—2001-02 Fiscal Year**

Instruction	Instructional Support Services	General Support Services	Fixed Capital Outlay	Total
\$21,814,257	\$4,022,751	\$14,129,589	\$265,677	\$40,232,274

Source: Audited Financial Statements.

As noted above, the general fund expenditures are higher than its revenues for the 2001-02 fiscal year. Additionally, these expenditures exceeded combined general fund revenues and other financing sources of \$600,000. The district used unreserved fund balance resources to cover excess expenditures.

Instruction and instructional support expenditures represented approximately 64 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 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 administrative, technical, and logistical support for the instruction program. It includes such activities as attendance, guidance, health, and psychological services. General support services expenditures represented approximately 35 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 (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 for the 2001-02 fiscal year by natural classification (object). This schedule shows the expenditures in Exhibit 11-4 by type of expenditure in broad categories.

**Exhibit 11-5  
General Fund Object Expenditures—2001-02 Fiscal Year**

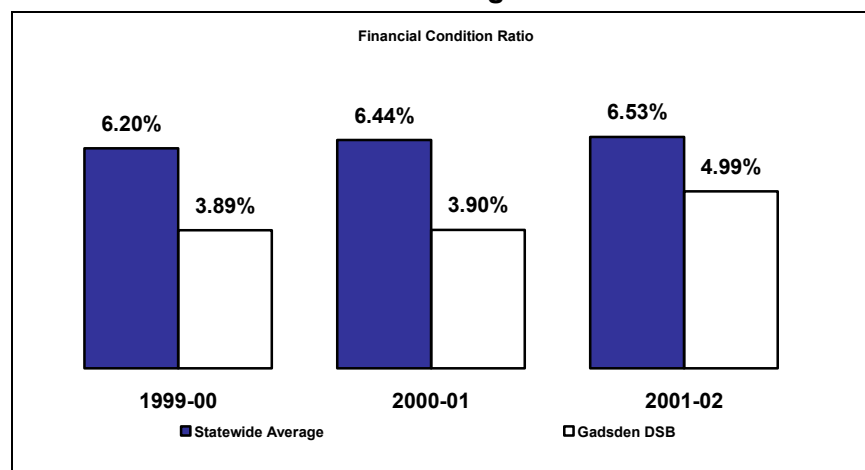
Salaries	Employee Benefits	Purchased Services	Energy Services	Materials and Supplies	Capital Outlay	Other Expenses	Total
\$25,573,006	\$6,021,494	\$4,565,368	\$1,370,595	\$1,911,027	\$672,504	\$118,280	\$40,232,274

Source: Audited Financial Statements.

As primarily a service organization, the district’s major expenditure objects are salaries and employee benefits which comprised 78.53 percent of total expenditures. Purchased services, energy services, materials and supplies, capital outlay, and other expenses were consistent with that of previous years.

We analyzed the fund balance in the general fund to determine if the district’s efforts to control costs have had a beneficial impact on its financial position. The most common measure of financial position is the ratio of fund balance to operating activity. The fund balance of most districts includes reserved and unreserved portions. Fund balances are often reserved for legal and other commitments of the entity. Common examples of reserves in Florida school districts include amounts reserved for outstanding purchase orders and contracts (encumbrances) and amounts reserved for restricted purposes (categorical programs). As a result, only the unreserved portion of the fund balance is actually available to offset unexpected needs and this portion is often referred to as the “rainy day” fund. For the purposes of our analysis, we used a common financial condition ratio that compares the general fund unreserved fund balance with operating revenues. Exhibit 11-6 compares the financial condition ratio for this district with statewide averages for the three-year period ending June 30, 2002.

**Exhibit 11-6  
The District’s General Fund Financial Condition Ratio is Lower than the Statewide Average**



Source: Audited Financial Statements.

As can be seen in Exhibit 11-6, the district’s ratio of unreserved fund balance to revenues over the past three years has increased.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Summary of Conclusions for Cost Control Systems Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
<b>Financial Management</b>	1. The district periodically analyzes the structure and staffing of its financial services organization.	Yes	11-7
	2. Management has developed and distributed written procedures for critical accounting processes and promotes ethical financial management.	No	11-8
	3. The district has adequate financial information systems that provide useful, timely, and accurate information.	Yes	11-9
	4. District financial staff analyzes significant expenditure processes to ensure that they are appropriately controlled.	Yes	11-10
<b>Internal Controls</b>	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.	No	11-11
	7. The district produces an annual budget that is tied to the strategic plan and provides useful and understandable information to users.	No	11-11
	8. Management analyzes strategic plans for measurable objectives and results.	No	11-12
<b>External and Internal Auditing</b>	9. The district ensures that it receives an annual external audit and uses the audit to improve its operations.	No	11-13
	10. The district has an effective internal audit function and uses the audits to improve its operations.	No	11-13
	11. The district ensures that audits of internal funds and its discretely presented component units (foundations and charter schools) are performed timely.	Yes	11-14
<b>Cash Management</b>	12. The district periodically reviews cash management activities, banking relationships, investment performance, and considers alternatives.	Yes	11-15
<b>Capital Asset Management</b>	13. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective management of capital assets.	No	11-16
	14. The district ensures that significant capital outlay purchases meet strategic plan objectives.	Yes	11-17
<b>Debt Management</b>	15. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective debt management.	Yes	11-17
	16. The district ensures that significant debt financings meet strategic plan objectives.	Yes	11-17
<b>Risk Management</b>	17. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective risk management.	Yes	11-18
	18. District staff periodically monitors the district's compliance with various laws and regulations related to risk management.	Yes	11-18
	19. The district prepares appropriate written cost and benefit analyses for insurance coverage.	Yes	11-18

*Cost Control Systems*

<b>Practice Area</b>	<b>Best Practice</b>	<b>Using the Best Practice?</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
<b>Purchasing</b>	20. The district has established written policies and procedures to take maximum advantage of competitive bidding, volume discounts, and special pricing arrangements.	No	11-19
<b>Inventory Management</b>	21. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective management of inventories.	Yes	11-21
	22. The district periodically evaluates the warehousing function to determine its cost-effectiveness.	No	11-21

# FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

## Best Practice 1: Using

**The district periodically analyzes the structure and staffing of its financial services organization. However, the district has not recently updated its organizational chart and has not evaluated outsourcing alternatives for selected finance-related activities.**

In recent years, a variety of external factors have had direct and indirect effects on district financial services. Some 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 Gadsden County School District has an organizational chart, which includes the financial services organization. The district also has position descriptions for all positions included in the organizational chart. Our review of position descriptions showed that educational and experience requirements for established positions were commensurate with the responsibilities for each position. Because of budgetary constraints, the assistant superintendent for business and finance and other management staff frequently evaluate the services provided by the financial services organization with a view towards minimizing the number of positions to effectively perform the responsibilities of this function. The assistant superintendent for business and finance has identified critical financial and accounting processes and has ensured that appropriate staff is cross-trained to perform these processes when the employees who are primarily responsible for performing those processes are absent. Financial services organization staff receive training in the use of the accounting system when hired and when any modifications are done on the accounting system. Also, the assistant superintendent for business and finance attends state finance officers’ association meetings and receives training relative to emerging issues in his responsibility areas at those meetings.

While the district has an organizational chart, the board has not updated or approved the chart since April 2001. According to the superintendent, the district is currently working on revising the organizational chart.

Although the district is using this best practice, it has not documented potential cost savings opportunities, if any, from outsourcing financial services. Given the small size of finance staff, the district may want to consider identifying job responsibilities such as payroll processing, physical counts of tangible personal property, or other financial services, and determine the estimated cost of contracting these services. Once the district has obtained these estimates, the district will be in a position to compare estimated contracted costs with actual costs and determine the cost benefits, if any.

**We recommend that the district continue its efforts to update and obtain board approval of the organizational chart and evaluate outsourcing alternatives for selected finance-related activities.**

## **Best Practice 2: Not Using**

**Although management has developed and distributed written procedures for critical accounting processes and promotes ethical financial management, the district does not have an ethics policy, nor has it developed a process that encourages the reporting of improprieties without fear of reprisal.**

It is critical that districts be able to continue day-to-day financial operations. Even small 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 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 assure compliance with board policies as well as documenting the intent of those policies;
- Protect the institutional knowledge of an organization, so that as experienced employees leave, new employees will have the 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 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 Gadsden County School District has established a written procedures manual for all critical financial and accounting processes. Although the district places a strong emphasis on professional and ethical conduct of its business, it needs to improve two areas to effectively use this best practice.

First, the district does not have an ethics policy. Developing such a policy will strengthen the overall control environment.

**Action Plan 11-1**

<b>We recommend that the district develop an ethics policy that includes remedies for unethical behavior.</b>		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop an ethics policy and present the policy to the board for approval.
	Step 2.	Subsequent to board approval and adoption of the policy, all existing and all new employees should be required to sign a statement indicating that they are aware of the ethics policy and its ramifications.
Who Is Responsible	Deputy Superintendent of Schools	
Time Frame	July 2004	

Second, the district has not developed procedures which provide a means for employees to confidentially report suspected improprieties without fear of reprisal.

**Action Plan 11-2**

<b>We recommend that the district develop a process which permits employees to report suspected improprieties without fear of reprisal.</b>		
Action Needed	Step 1:	Develop a policy for the confidential reporting of suspected improprieties and present the policy to the board for approval.
	Step 2:	Subsequent to board approval and adoption of the policy, distribute the newly developed procedures to all employees and post at all work sites.
Who Is Responsible	Deputy Superintendent of Schools	
Time Frame	July 2004	

**Best Practice 3: Using**

**The district has adequate financial information systems that provide useful, timely, and accurate information. However, district staff does not fully participate in the direct deposit of payroll checks. In addition, the district could enhance and streamline the purchase order process by the use of a computerized purchase order system.**

Florida school districts are subject to significant federal, state, and local (board) oversight of their financial activities. Also, given the limited financial resources provided 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 Gadsden County School District uses an integrated enterprise accounting system that has various subsystem modules (such as accounts payable, payroll accounting, warehouse inventory) that interface seamlessly with the general ledger module. This system permits users to make entries at the subsidiary level and these entries automatically update 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 allow users to easily create user-defined reports at any time and detail balance reports (such as accounts payable details) agree with general ledger balances. The district’s finance staff works with users, including the board, to identify financial reporting needs. As these needs become known, finance staff develops financial report products to meet user needs.

Our interview with the superintendent and other administrative staff showed that these users have access to the accounting system to view their department’s financial records and may obtain, upon request, monthly financial reports from the Finance Department. The district’s financial services staff are satisfied with the system’s reporting package and believe that its ease of use permits them to have the required Superintendent’s Annual Financial Report completed well before the required report date. Currently, approximately 50 percent of district employees permit the district to direct deposit their payroll checks. The district could achieve greater payroll processing and accounting efficiencies if it achieved 100 percent participation. District staff must account for payroll checks and track them from the time the

district issues them through the time the checks are presented for payment at the bank. Also, district personnel must perform bank reconciliations, file, and safeguard payroll checks (both blank checks and paid checks). The district must provide adequate and safe storage for the checks and follow appropriate public record retention periods and requirements for eventual destruction of the payroll checks. Many of these time consuming processes could be eliminated or greatly reduced when using direct deposit. Although the district may not derive cost savings from using direct deposit, the increased control over payroll processing would add greater efficiencies to the overall payroll transaction process. The efficiencies gained will allow the district to reallocate resources to other district priorities.

**We recommend that the district try to achieve 100 percent participation in the direct deposit of payroll checks.**

In addition, the district manually prepares purchase orders to document the account code, dollar value, and approval for expenditures; maintains a manual purchase order log to account for the purchase orders; and enters the purchase order information into the accounting system to encumber the funds. However, the district could enhance and streamline this process by the use of a computerized purchase order system. With a computerized purchase order system, the district could enter the purchase order information into the system that would automatically generate sequentially numbered purchase orders, post encumbrances to the accounting records and eliminate the need to prepare manual purchase orders and the purchase order log. By eliminating the manually prepared documents, district staff may be able to increase the timeliness of posting financial information into the accounting system or redirect efforts to other areas.

**We recommend that the district implement the use of a computerized purchase order system.**

#### **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 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 contract, payment, 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.

The Gadsden County School District assigns payment monitoring for specific high cost and complex contracts to directors and coordinators. These individuals are responsible for understanding contract terms and reviewing all bills and approving them prior to payment.

Specific expenditure categories, such as utility payments and travel expenditures are assigned to a specific accounts clerk who is knowledgeable about payment patterns and legal requirements for these payments. We noted that utility payments were monitored by location and, if appropriate, by meter to identify unusual changes between months and to identify unusual seasonal changes. District employees investigated any unusual changes that were noticed.

# INTERNAL CONTROLS

## Best Practice 5: Using

**The district has established adequate internal controls.**

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.

In addition to its annual external audit, the Gadsden County School District is also subject to monitoring reviews by federal and state grant monitors. Our review of these reports issued for the past three fiscal years disclosed that, with the exception of certain internal control deficiencies such as weaknesses over capital assets, the auditors and monitors found that internal controls were generally adequate. Also, our review of these reports issued for the past three fiscal years disclosed that critical revenue and expenditure classes, such as collection cycles, payroll processing, and disbursement processing showed adequate internal control processes and that the processes appeared to be operating as intended.

## Best Practice 6: Not Using

**Management attempts to proactively respond to identified internal control weaknesses; however, it has had difficulty in correcting some findings.**

As noted previously, 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. Districts demonstrate effective financial management when they proactively respond to internal control weaknesses identified in external audits and other monitoring reviews.

The Gadsden County School District is not using this best practice because its efforts to resolve internal control weaknesses identified in the external financial audits and other monitoring reviews in the past three years have not been effective for certain findings that the auditors continued to cite. For example, we noted that auditors consistently noted deficiencies in the district’s tangible personal property records and there was no evidence of record that the board was monitoring the process to timely correct such findings.

### Action Plan 11-3

**We recommend that the board establish procedures to ensure that the district promptly takes action to correct findings noted in external financial audits and other monitoring reviews.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	For each audit or monitoring review finding, assign an employee the responsibility to resolve the audit or monitoring report finding in a timely manner.
	Step 2.	Periodically, require the employee responsible for corrective action to report the status of such action to the board.
Who Is Responsible	Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance	
Time Frame	July 2004	

## Best Practice 7: Not Using

**The district produces an annual budget which provides useful and understandable information for the user; however, the district’s strategic plan is not tied to the budget.**

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 Gadsden County School District has a Strategic Plan/School Improvement and Accountability Handbook that sets short-term academic performance goals and strategies. In the handbook, the district assigned to appropriate departments the responsibility for each educational goal, strategies to achieve the goals, time-frame to accomplish the goals, and tools to evaluate and measure the progress toward achieving the goals. However, the handbook does not include the financial effects, if any, of established goals and priorities and the budget for each responsible department and/or cost center does not identify the appropriations established for meeting strategic plan objectives. Financial effects of long-term and short-term (annual) goals and priorities are important for district staff developing the budget to ensure that planned expenditures are for activities that will meet the board’s strategic priorities. In addition, users need to be able to review measures and budgets to determine the district’s effectiveness in meeting strategic plan objectives. The district could compare costs of various departments and cost centers that are meeting strategic plan objectives in an effort to identify additional efficiencies. For example, different schools that have met a specified strategic plan objective may have incurred different costs to meet the same objective. The district can review the costs of the different schools to identify the differences and evaluate whether additional cost efficiencies can be achieved.

**Action Plan 11-4**

**We recommend that the board develop a strategic plan to include a prioritization of long-term and short-term financial and budgetary goals and establish links between their strategic plan objectives and the budget planning process.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	List all strategic plan objectives and rank them in order of importance and cost.
	Step 2.	Ensure that during each budget planning meeting, the strategic plan objectives list is considered.
	Step 3.	After the proposed budget is completed, ensure that all strategic plan objectives are 1) noted as being included in the budget, or 2) reassigned to another budget year within the strategic plan.
Who Is Responsible	Deputy Superintendent of Schools	
Time Frame	July 2004	

**Best Practice 8: Not Using**

**District management analyzes strategic plans for measurable objectives or measurable results; however, the district has not established measures for financial goals.**

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.

Our review of the Gadsden County School District strategic plan showed that certain objectives are measurable and clearly related to achievement of the associated goal. The district generally used Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test and other universal objectives to measure educational achievement. However, the district is not using this best practice because it has not established measures for financial goals, such as establishing a required minimum level of unreserved fund balance. The prioritization of the board’s financial goals in a strategic plan would provide guidance in budget development and would assist the board and administrators when making spending decisions. With the board’s financial priorities clearly defined, public awareness of these goals would be enhanced, and a basis would be established to ensure continuity of these goals in the event that administrative changes occurred.

**Action Plan 11-5**

<b>We recommend that the district establish measurable financial goals in their strategic plan.</b>		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish the financial measures consistent with strategic plan goals.
	Step 2.	Develop criteria for determining achievement of the measures.
	Step 3.	Implement procedures to monitor adherence to the plan.
Who Is Responsible	Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance	
Time Frame	July 2004	

## EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL AUDITING

### Best Practice 9: Not Using

**The district ensures that it receives an annual external audit; however, district operations could be improved to sufficiently resolve audit findings in a timely manner.**

Section 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 principals 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.

The Gadsden County School District has received annual financial audits for each of the last three years. These audits were performed in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards and government auditing standards. Generally, audit reports over the past three years have included findings that the auditors continued to cite such as inadequate controls over tangible personal property records and the failure to develop an adequate strategic plan. Action plan 11-3 includes the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

### Best Practice 10: Not Using

**The district does not have an internal audit function and it has not conducted annual risk assessments of its operations.**

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 its 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.

## Cost Control Systems

The Gadsden County School District does not have an internal audit function as anticipated by this best practice and the district does not conduct annual risk assessments of its financial operations and activities. As with many school districts, the district believes that it cannot afford the cost of establishing an internal audit function.

The district is responsible for having internal controls in place to provide reasonable assurance regarding the achievement of the following objectives: (1) safeguarding of assets, (2) the reliability of financial reporting, (3) the effectiveness and efficiency of operations, and (4) compliance with applicable laws and regulations. In order to meet these objectives, the district should identify and analyze relevant risks using a risk assessment as a basis for determining how identified risks should be managed.

Some recurring risks are already addressed by various departments within the district. For example, the district monitors student full-time equivalent counts to ensure that significant errors in reporting are detected and corrected before the counts are reported to the state. The district has established procedures for ensuring that inventories are counted annually and correctly to ensure stewardship for these assets. The district ensures that it obtains the required audits of the school internal accounts on an annual basis.

These activities, along with performing the annual risk assessment, are those that would typically be performed by an internal audit function. An established internal audit function would also be available to address other financial risks identified in an annual risk assessment that district management is not effectively addressing. Regardless of whether or not the district establishes an internal audit function, it should conduct financial risk assessments of its operations and activities annually.

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.

### Action Plan 11-6

**We recommend that the district conduct annual risk assessments.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Conduct annual risk assessments using district staff.
	Step 2.	If district staff is unable to conduct assessments, develop and distribute a request for proposal for risk assessment services; review proposals for risk assessment services and select a firm that will perform the risk assessment for the district.
	Step 3.	Review the results of the risk assessment, prioritize high-risk activities, and assign responsibility for addressing and resolving prioritized risks.
Who Is Responsible	Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance	
Time Frame	July 2004	

### Best Practice 11: Using

**The district ensures that audits of internal funds and its charter school are performed timely.**

The financial transactions of individual school activities and organizations are accounted for in the school internal accounts (funds). The 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 related organizations, their financial activity generally should

be included with that of the school district. However, the law requires that these related organizations provide for their annual financial audits. School districts frequently provide little if any oversight of these related organizations other than to monitor their activity. Monitoring responsibilities frequently are achieved by review of the annual audit reports. Accordingly, it is important that the districts receive timely audits of these related organizations and perform appropriate review of the reports.

The Gadsden County School District has one charter school (the Crossroads Academy Charter School, a division of Community and Economic Development Organization of Gadsden County, Inc.) which is not a discretely presented component unit of the district. Since law requirements provide that this organization be audited by other auditors, the district has negotiated a contract to require that this organization provide, by September 30 of each fiscal year, an annual audit of its June 30 fiscal year financial statements. Each fiscal year, an audit of the charter school and its financial statements is conducted, as required by law, and the district receives and maintains copies of these audit reports.

The district has a contract in place to have the internal accounts audited by December 31, after the June 30 fiscal year-end date of each fiscal year. We did note that the auditors of the internal accounts noted deficiencies in the financial records at one school, which caused them to be unable to express an opinion on the financial statements of that school. Action Plan 11-3 provides a methodology which would ensure that the district take prompt action to correct such findings.

## CASH MANAGEMENT

### **Best Practice 12: Using**

**The district periodically reviews cash management activities, banking relationships, investment performance, and considers alternatives.**

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 Gadsden County School District uses various bank accounts for transactions by fund. The district makes transfers from its investment account into two minimum-balance bank accounts (payroll and accounts payable). There are only four local banks and the district utilizes three of them for banking services. In addition, the district reviews the features offered by the three banks to ensure that the district receives competitive banking services while minimizing the number of times the district has to change banks.

The district's policy manual includes a policy for investment activities. The district receives the majority of its cash in the form of wire transfers from the state or the local tax collector, which is directly sent to the district's local bank. Sufficient personnel are employed in the Finance Department to provide adequate segregation of duties for the cash receipts and disbursement functions. A finance account clerk and the school food service secretary, both with no cash handling responsibilities, perform the reconciliation process for the district's bank accounts.

The assistant superintendent for business and finance is responsible for monitoring cash balances and transferring excess funds to the State Board of Administration for investments. The district places all 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.

# CAPITAL ASSET MANAGEMENT

## Best Practice 13: Not Using

**The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to generally provide for effective management of capital assets. However, internal controls over tangible personal property could be enhanced.**

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 Gadsden County School District has developed detailed procedures for accounting for capital assets. These procedures are supplemented by state law and *Rules of the Auditor General*, which govern school district responsibilities relative to capital assets. State law defines property as fixtures and other tangible personal property of a nonconsumable nature, the value of which is \$750 or more, and the normal expected life of which is one year or more. Gadsden County School District, as permitted by state law, uses a lower capitalization threshold (\$500 or more) for tangible personal property. The district's Finance Department is responsible for purchasing and accounting for tangible personal property. School principals and department managers have custodial responsibilities for property charged to and under their area of responsibility.

District policies require the staff to conduct an annual physical tangible personal inventory and reconcile the results of the inventory with the district's subsidiary ledgers. However, during the 2001-02 fiscal year, the staff did not, for the most part, inventory the tangible personal property and did not record many of the property purchases in the detailed property records.

### Action Plan 11-7

**We recommend that the board strengthen internal control over capital assets to provide for timely posting of detailed subsidiary records and to ensure that a complete physical inventory be properly conducted of all tangible personal property. As an alternative of having district staff conduct the annual inventory, the board may consider contracting with a private vendor to provide this service.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Timely record relevant information from property purchases to the detailed property subsidiary records.
	Step 2.	Conduct an annual inventory of all tangible personal property.
	Step 3.	Compare the results of the tangible personal property inventory with the property records.
	Step 4.	Trace and reconcile discrepancies noted between the tangible personal property inventory and the property records.
Who Is Responsible	Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance	
Time Frame	July 2004	

### **Best Practice 14: Using**

#### **The district ensures that significant capital outlay purchases 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 for all district operations, including the capital acquisition program, and links them to the achievement of institutional goals.

The Gadsden County School District prepares annual capital project budgets and has developed approval processes that ensure that only appropriate expenditures are charged to capital project budgets. Also, the district has a five-year facilities work program plan that addresses long range goals concerning significant capital outlay purchases and the district uses the five-year facilities work plan to develop the district's annual capital projects budget.

## **DEBT MANAGEMENT**

### **Best Practice 15: Using**

#### **The district's process for debt management is adequate, considering the infrequency of the district's long-term financing arrangements.**

Many school districts must identify and procure other sources of financing to meet current facility needs and, in some instances, operating needs. There are specific provisions of state law that govern school districts' ability to incur debt. 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 Gadsden County School District does not frequently enter into long-term financing arrangements; however, it currently participates in two bond issues administered by the State Board of Education. As such, written policies and detailed procedures are not required. When needed, the district uses 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.

### **Best Practice 16: Using**

#### **The district ensures that significant debt financing 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 includes all district operations, including the capital acquisition program, and links them to the achievement of institutional goals.

Currently, the Gadsden County School District's strategic plan objectives do not address debt management. However, as capital projects needs are identified, prioritized, and given a value, the district will evaluate revenue streams and fund balance resources as well as optional revenue streams such as the capital outlay millage levy and financing options. When evaluating options for possible debt financing, the district will use a financial advisor. Based on the advice of the financial advisor, the board will be presented with the best financing alternative given the district's specific needs for approval.

## RISK MANAGEMENT

### **Best Practice 17: Using**

**The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for 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.<sup>1</sup>

The Gadsden County School District has established a policy for risk management. The district's assistant superintendent for business and finance is the risk manager and is responsible for implementing the district's risk management policy and ensuring that the district has acquired all insurance coverage required by law.

### **Best Practice 18: Using**

**District staff periodically monitors the district's compliance with various laws and regulations related to risk management.**

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. Florida law allows school districts to purchase insurance, to be self-insured, to enter into risk management programs, or to have any combination of the above in any area to the extent the district is either authorized or required by law to contract for insurance. Due to the significant risks that school districts are exposed to, it is important that they effectively monitor compliance with the various laws and regulations related to risk management.

As mentioned above, the Gadsden County School District's assistant superintendent for business and finance is responsible monitoring the adequacy of the district's insurance program and periodically reviews the district's insurance programs to ensure compliance with various laws and regulations related to risk management.

### **Best Practice 19: Using**

**The district prepares adequate written cost and benefit analyses for insurance coverage; however, district records did not evidence that the board specifically reviewed and approved the district's insurance program.**

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. To maximize effectiveness, school districts should regularly evaluate the costs of their risk management programs and compare their

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<sup>1</sup> 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 are discussed in Chapter 6 – Personnel Systems and Benefits.

costs with their peers and continually evaluate new risk management products to determine the cost benefit.

The Gadsden County School District's risk management function has established processes to determine current valuations of district assets to ensure that insurance policies cover recent changes in assets. Annually, the assistant superintendent of business and finance (risk manager) reviews various insurance coverage options, including loss limits, deductibles, and premiums costs. However, we noted that district records did not evidence that the board reviewed and approved the district's commercial insurance coverages.

**We recommend that the board document its analysis of the risks of loss under its current insurance coverage and its determination that the district is adequately protected against loss.**

## PURCHASING

### Best Practice 20: Not Using

**The district has established written policies and procedures to take advantage of competitive bidding, volume discounts, and special pricing arrangements; however, the district could make enhancements to its purchasing process.**

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. 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.

The Gadsden County School District consolidates and bids recurring purchases when feasible. When practical, the district also uses various state purchasing contracts and piggybacks on the bids of other districts. The district generally follows its purchasing policy, which provides that purchases of items or groups of items exceeding \$15,000 shall be made on the basis of competitive bids. Purchase of items or groups of items exceeding \$3,000, but less than \$15,000, shall be made once three quotes are obtained or written justification as to why they could not be obtained. The superintendent is authorized to approve all purchases not to exceed \$15,000.

State law exempts purchases of information technology resources, such as computers and computer software, from the bidding requirement and allows direct negotiations and contracts with vendors for such purchases. However, in some cases, such direct negotiations may not necessarily provide the lowest and best prices consistent with desired quality and performance. In addition, we noted instances during the 2002-03 fiscal year that the district directly negotiated technology purchases over \$25,000 and did not obtain specific board approval.

**Accordingly, we recommend that the board consider revising its purchasing policy to include the involvement of the assistant superintendent for business and finance in the preliminary stages of the negotiations process to purchase technology resources. As an alternative, the board may want to impose a dollar limit on the direct negotiation method of purchasing technology products. We also recommend that the district enhance their procedures and ensure that the board review and approve, as applicable, all purchases exceeding \$25,000.**

Formal competitive bid processes are generally time and resource consuming. The district's current competitive bid threshold is \$15,000, which is lower than the statutorily established maximum (currently



\$25,000). Changing the bid threshold to the statutorily established maximum would enhance the district's purchasing processes and could possibly allow the district to achieve resource efficiencies that could be reallocated to other essential district needs.

**We recommend that the district raise its \$15,000 threshold for competitive bids to statutorily established maximums (currently \$25,000).**

The district currently does not have a purchasing card program but generally uses purchase orders to document the preauthorization function for board disbursements. District staff expressed reluctance to implement a purchasing card system because the system may fail to provide preauthorization of purchases and, because of the district's current warehouse function, there is only a minimal number of small purchases. A purchasing card program established for use by district employees to make small purchases without going through the process of generating a purchase order could be more efficient by allowing district staff to obtain low cost items such as materials and supplies for immediate use and possibly eliminate the need for the warehouse function.

### Action Plan 11-8

**We recommend that the district implement a pilot purchasing card program to determine its effectiveness.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Perform an analysis of the purchasing card programs offered by various vendors and the state; then select the program that would be most beneficial to the district.</p> <p>Step 2. Evaluate the district's organizational structure and select specific departments/individuals to participate in the pilot purchasing card program. Those selected should have a genuine need for the purchasing card and already be heavily involved in the purchasing process for their department/site.</p> <p>Step 3. Present the purchasing card program proposal to the board along with revised purchasing policies and procedures to include internal controls needed for the purchasing card program, including measures to be taken by the district for employees who misuse the cards, such as repayment through wage garnishment, termination, and prosecution.</p> <p>Step 4. To test the effectiveness and internal controls of the purchasing card program, implement a pilot program in steps, starting with specific departments with specific restrictions on the cards to allow only purchases that are unique to those departments.</p> <p>Step 5. Update the policies and procedures based on the results of this pilot program.</p> <p>Step 6. If the pilot program is successful, expand the use of the purchasing card program to additional departments/employees and promote greater use of the purchasing cards for purchases under \$750. This will include evaluating and revising daily and monthly card purchase limits so that the purchases can be made. These procedures should address methods by which purchasing cards can be used for purchase requisitions for amounts less than \$750 made by employees who are not assigned purchasing cards and address any purchase restrictions.</p>
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Who Is Responsible	Assistant Superintendent of Business and Finance
Time Frame	July 2004

# INVENTORY MANAGEMENT

## Best Practice 21: Using

**The district has implemented internal controls and procedures for management of inventories; however, the district has not developed and adopted formal written policies setting forth the responsibilities for safeguarding these assets.**

Many school districts have chosen to centralize their warehousing function. In many instances, district inventories include desirable items that are subject to misappropriation. Depending on the size of the warehousing function and the nature of the inventory items stored, it is essential that these school districts establish effective policies and procedures that ensure that the inventory assets are appropriately controlled, safeguarded, and accounted for.

The Gadsden County School District reports inventory in the general fund for the Transportation Department, Maintenance Department, instructional materials, and custodial supplies and in the special revenue fund for food/commodities and nonfood items for the school food service program. The district also maintains perpetual inventory records for all inventory types except maintenance inventories and the district's financial statements generally reflect inventory values based on actual year-end inventory counts. While the district has implemented procedures to manage inventories, the district has not developed and adopted written policies for proper accountability and safeguarding of these assets.

**We recommend that the district enhance controls by developing and adopting a written inventory policy to set forth the responsibilities for safeguarding these assets.**

## 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 districts has been to fully eliminate central warehouses and replace them with inventory supply delivery services for applicable and appropriate items.

The Gadsden County School District maintains a central warehouse for school, office, janitorial, and food-related supplies. The district also provides lists of warehouse items and prices to its locations, and the district charges schools/departments a 2 percent mark-up for the inventory items other than food service supplies received from the warehouse. District staff indicated that, due to bulk purchasing, the warehouse prices are generally lower than vendor retail prices. However, although requested, district staff could not provide documentation that its warehouse function, including consideration for expenditures for staff salaries and other overhead costs, was more cost effective than having schools or departments purchase supplies directly from vendors or outsourcing inventory services.

**Action Plan 11-9**

**We recommend that the district prepare a cost analysis of operating the warehouse and compare the district's cost to alternative inventory services.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Determine the costs (staff salaries, equipment, facility, overhead cost, other) associated with maintaining inventories by review and analysis of accounting records.
	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 recommendations to the superintendent.
	Step 5.	If more beneficial, the board should contract for alternative inventory services.
Who Is Responsible	Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance	
Time Frame	July 2004	

# A

## Appendix A

**Educational Services—Basic Education and Disaggregate for all special student populations (ESE, ESOL, At-Risk, Title 1, Low SES, etc.) of sufficient numbers who expected to receive a regular diploma**

School Board and Management Level	Program Level
School Grades	Suspension rates
FCAT Scores	Interim test scores (district choice of test)
Graduation rates	Retention rates
College placement test scores (SAT/ACT)	Absenteeism
Remediation rates (post graduation for students going to higher education)	

**Educational Services—ESE1 (in addition to measures given above)**

School Board and Management Level	Program Level
	Average time from referral to provision of services
	Percentage of referrals found in need of services
	Percentage of time ESE students spend in regular classes
	SEC characteristics of ESE students compared to regular students or state averages

**Educational Services—ESOL1 (in addition to measures given above)**

School Board and Management Level	Program Level
	Average time from referral to provision of services
	Average time in program

**Educational Services—Vocational/Technical**

School Board and Management Level	Program Level
Placement rates	Technical skill acquisition rates
Post-placement wages	Academic skill acquisition rate

**Technology**

School Board and Management Level	Program Level
Percentage of students with desired technology skills (ISTE standards)	Percentage of teachers using technology for instruction
	Percentage of teachers using technology for administration
	Percentage of teachers using technology for communication
	Percentage of teachers using technology to assess student performance
	Percentage of principals with desired technology skills (ISTE standards)
	User satisfaction with tech support (teachers/administrators/other staff)

**Construction**

School Board and Management Level	Program Level
Cost per square foot (new projects, renovations, remodeling)	Average number and dollar amount of change orders per contract
Cost per student station	Percentage of project cost due to change orders

**Maintenance**

School Board and Management Level	Program Level
Maintenance/operation cost per gross square foot	Customer satisfaction with maintenance services
	Customer satisfaction with custodial services
	Energy cost per gross square foot
	Cost of custodial operations per net square foot
	Number of custodians per net square foot
	Number of maintenance crafts persons per gross square foot
	Number of maintenance crafts persons per gross square foot

Note: Because Franklin County’s schools are operating below capacity, maintenance performance measures based on square footage do not provide a true picture of district operations. We recommend that the district consider the performance measures in Action Plan 8-1, as they more accurately measure and reflect current district conditions.

**Transportation**

School Board and Management Level	Program Level
Cost per student (operational only)	Cost per mile
Percentage of buses arriving/departing on time	Average bus occupancy
	Vehicle breakdowns per 100,000 mile
	Accidents per million miles
	Driver absentee rate

**Food Service**

School Board and Management Level	Program Level
Gross margin (revenue less expenses)	Labor margin (percentage of total expenses comprising labor and benefits)
Participation rates (regular and free and reduced lunch)	Materials margin (percentage of total expenses comprising food and materials)
	Average meals served per labor hour

**Safety and Security**

School Board and Management Level	Program Level
Property damage due to accidents/incidents.	
Personal injury requiring physician care due to accidents/incidents.	

# B

## Gadsden County School Grades, 2000-2003

The table below shows the school performance grades of Gadsden County public schools for the last three years. Pursuant to s. 1008.34, *Florida Statutes*, the Florida Department of Education identifies letter-grade categories and assigns grades based on current year performance and the school's annual learning gains.

**Table B-1**

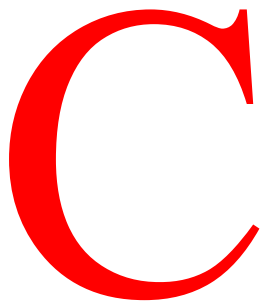
	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
<b>Elementary Schools</b>			
George W. Munroe	D	D	C
Havana	D	D	I <sup>1</sup>
Greensboro	A	C	C
Chattahoochee	D	D	F
Gretna	B	B	B
Midway Magnet (K-8)	N	N	N
St. John	D	C	A
Stewart Street	C	F	B
<b>Middle Schools</b>			
Havana	C	C	C
Carter-Parramore	D	D	C
<b>High Schools and Combination Middle and High Schools</b>			
Havana Northside	D	D	F
Chattahoochee High	D	D	D
Greensboro High	D/C <sup>2</sup>	C	D
Shanks	D	F	F
<b>Charter Schools</b>			
Crossroad Academy (K-8)	-	N <sup>3</sup>	C
<b>Other</b>			
Gadsden Technical Institute (Vocational)	D	N <sup>3</sup>	N <sup>3</sup>
Quincy Educational Academy (Alternative Education, 9-12)	N <sup>3</sup>	N <sup>3</sup>	F

<sup>1</sup> Havana Elementary School earned enough points to receive a grade of D, but since it only tested 70% of its eligible students instead of the required 90%, it received an Incomplete (I) instead of a letter grade.

<sup>2</sup> Although combination schools currently receive a single school grade, at one time the Department of Education assigned separate grades for different grade levels. For example, for the 2000-01 school year, Greensboro received a D based on the performance of its students in grades 7-8, and a C based on the performance of students in grades 9-12.

<sup>3</sup> "N" signifies a new school, or a school that does not receive a grade. For example, Gadsden Technical Institute does not receive a grade because it is no longer a full-service high school, and Midway Magnet School does not serve a sufficient number of students to receive a grade.

Source: OPPAGA compilation of information from the Florida Department of Education's *School Accountability Report* for school years 2000-01 through 2002-2003.



# Action Plan

## *Performance Accountability Systems*

### Action Plan 3-1

**We recommend that the district develop measurable objectives and measures for all of its major instructional and non-instructional programs, develop performance measure data collection mechanisms so that progress in achieving objectives can be measured, conduct in-depth evaluations of programs exhibiting poor performance, and report program performance to the board and the public.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Identify a few high-level outcome and efficiency measures for inclusion into the district’s strategic plan that reflect board priorities for educational and operational programs and services and rank the measures in their order of importance. In addition, for each major educational and operational program identify supporting measures that reflect the primary purpose of each program that managers can use to monitor performance. The district may wish to consider adopting measures provided in Appendix A. 1</p> <p>Step 2. For each performance measure, identify the data needed and determine the information below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Who will collect performance data and how often?</li> <li>▪ What is the source of the data (e.g., state or district reports)?</li> <li>▪ In what format is the data needed?</li> <li>▪ How often should the data be collected?</li> <li>▪ Who (program staff, department head, assistant superintendent, superintendent, school board) will the data be reported to and how often?</li> <li>▪ How should the data be used?</li> </ul> <p>Step 3. Identify and prioritize data needs by classifying data into the following two categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ data currently available, accessible, and in the format needed to determine progress toward program goals and objectives and</li> <li>▪ data currently either not available, accessible or in the format needed to determine progress toward program goals and objectives.</li> </ul> <p>Step 4. For each measure, determine a standard (benchmark) for performance the district would like to achieve, which may be based on past performance, the performance of comparable districts, or industry standards.</p> <p>Step 5. For each measure or related measures develop a written statement (objective) that indicates the desired performance (result) or improvement target. For academic programs, objectives should be stated in terms of student outcomes (that is, the effect the program will have on participating students if the program is successful). For operational programs, objectives should be stated in terms of the quality and cost of service provided or desired performance. Objectives should be</p>
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Appendix C

- either short-term (two to three years) or mid-term (four to five years);
- address major aspects of the program’s purpose and expenditures;
- be specific;
- be easily understood;
- be challenging but achievable;
- be measurable and quantifiable;

Examples of objectives include:

“The food service program will maintain a labor margin of \_\_\_% in 2003-04.”

“By 2005, the facilities department will decrease average energy cost per gross square foot from \$\_\_\_\_\_ to \$\_\_\_\_\_ which is consistent with the average of its peers (identify peers).”

“By 2004, the maintenance department will reduce number of custodians per net square foot to \_\_\_\_\_ which is consistent with the industry standard of 1:\_\_\_\_\_.”

“By 2005, FCAT scores for alternative education students will meet or exceed the state average.”

- Step 6. Link the district budget to the priorities established in the strategic plan.
- Step 7. Periodically compare district performance data to data from other, comparable districts or programs to determine whether the district could improve its operations.
- Step 8. Based on the ongoing analysis described in Step 7 above, identify undesirable trends in performance and cost that need more in-depth evaluation.
- Step 9. Conduct more in-depth evaluations to identify the cause and potential remedies to address trends identified in Step 8. Put the results of these in-depth evaluations in writing. Provide the written results of in-depth evaluations to the school board.
- Step 10. At least annually, report performance related to high-level measures to the school board and the public.
- Step 11. Annually review, and if necessary, amend the strategic plan to reflect changes in community standards, student needs, or board direction.

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Who Is Responsible	Superintendent and the school board
Time Frame	July 2005

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<sup>1</sup> The district is taking steps to begin to implement Action Plan 3-1 and has recently developed a new strategic plan.

## *Educational Service Delivery*

### Action Plan 4-1

**We recommend that the district develop and implement a system for monitoring Exceptional Student Education (ESE) processes to ensure the timely evaluation and placement of students.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Map steps in the ESE student assessment and placement process; identify data elements needed to track processes, such as the number of days elapsed from referral to assessment or from assessment to placement; and modify district information systems to generate appropriate monitoring reports. Also track the percentage of referred students identified as qualifying for exceptional student education services.</p> <p>Step 2. Establish goals, methods and timeframes for monitoring and reporting of student status. Information should be disaggregated by type of exceptionality and by school.</p> <p>Step 3. Develop annual district objectives and strategies for improvement. Provide schools with technical assistance to ensure that school improvement plans address performance gaps, and to help the schools achieve annual performance objectives.</p> <p>Step 4. Annually assess school and district performance in relation to established objectives, and report results to the school board. Include an assessment of barriers to attaining goals.</p>
Who Is Responsible	ESE director and program staff; school advisory councils; school-based ESE teachers
Time Frame	2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter

### Action Plan 4-2

**We recommend that the district conduct a comprehensive assessment of its ESE program to evaluate whether it has sufficient policies in place to ensure programs meet student needs.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Conduct an assessment of district policies for placing ESE students, including placement options, decision criteria, and the kinds of supports available for teachers working with ESE students in regular and self-contained classrooms.</p> <p>Step 2. Identify the needs for ESE certified employees in schools. Determine the barriers that have hindered prior recruitment efforts, and identify recruitment resources and incentives that can be used to attract ESE teachers.</p> <p>Step 3. Based on teacher input, develop a plan for providing support for teachers working with ESE students.</p> <p>Step 4. Develop and implement the system improvement plan required by the Florida Department of Education.</p> <p>Step 5. Regularly assess progress in increasing district support for serving ESE students. In addition to developing systems to ensure teachers receive needed support, solicit feedback from administrators, non-instructional personnel and parents.</p>
Who is Responsible	Deputy superintendent for Schools and Instruction, ESE director and program staff, school-based ESE teachers
Timeframe	2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter

**Action Plan 4-3**

**We recommend that the district develop and implement a plan to recruit bilingual teachers or paraprofessionals to bring it into compliance with state requirements for ESOL programs.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Identify the needs for bilingual staff in schools, and determine the barriers that have hindered prior recruitment efforts.</p> <p>Step 2. With technical assistance from the Florida Department of Education and the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium, as needed, identify recruitment resources and incentives that can be used to attract bilingual teachers and paraprofessionals.</p> <p>Step 3. Present plan to school board for approval and action.</p>
Who Is Responsible	School board; superintendent of schools; ESOL coordinator; assistant superintendent of Human Resources, Policy, and Staff Development; and Florida Department of Education
Time Frame	2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter

**Action Plan 4-4**

**We recommend that the district expand access to alternative education programs for students who may benefit from an alternative education placement, and explore ways to use alternative education programs to address the identified discipline and dropout problems in the district.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Establish a team made up of district and school staff responsible for reviewing the district's use of its alternative education program, and coordinating with other district-level planning initiatives.</p> <p>Step 2. Conduct a needs assessment and plan for expanding the program that incorporates both educational and behavioral components, and includes: an assessment of finances and staffing needs; a suggested organizational and communication structure for administering and monitoring the school; criteria for admitting students; and criteria for assigning qualified instructional staff to the program.</p> <p>Step 3. Present plan to school board for approval and action.</p>
Who Is Responsible	School Board; deputy superintendent of Schools and Instruction; principal of district alternative education school; designed team members
Time Frame	2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter

**Action Plan 4-5**

**We recommend that the district increase its use of in-school suspension programs, so that students can continue to be engaged in educational programs while serving the consequence for inappropriate behavior. The school board should consider centralizing operations, and establishing an education-based suspension program within the alternative education school.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Disaggregate student suspension data to clarify how the suspension option is used in the district. Identify trends and needs, and determine barriers that have prevented the district from using education-based suspension programs.</p> <p>Step 2. Review district policies related to student behavior and suspension to ensure they are specific and reasonable, and emphasize the need for education-based suspension programs that are integral to the curriculum of each school.</p> <p>Step 3. Develop a tiered suspension program, ranging from removal from class, to placement in a centralized in-school suspension program, to recommendation for alternative placement, to out-of-school suspension.</p> <p>Step 4. Identify resource needs in the areas of facility, staffing, training, curriculum, and program monitoring and evaluation.</p> <p>Step 5. Present plan for increasing the use of in-school suspension to the school board for approval and action.</p>
Who Is Responsible	School Board; deputy superintendent of Schools and Instruction; district and school staff.
Time Frame	2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter

**Action Plan 4-6**

**We recommend that the district provide additional guidance to schools, to help them effectively plan to meet the educational needs of their students.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Work with the Florida Department of Education to provide district staff with adequate training to oversee the improvement planning process for district schools.</p> <p>Step 2. Identify model school improvement plans (SIPs), and train school-level administrators and advisory council members in how to develop, implement and monitor such plans.</p> <p>Step 3. Establish a formal review process for school improvement plans, which lays out required components, e.g., including academic and non-academic needs, and specifies criteria for district review and approval of the plans.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Florida Department of Education; district and school staff; school advisory councils
Time Frame	2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter

**Action Plan 4-7**

**We recommend that the district enhance its efforts to ensure that students perform at grade level.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Continue to implement remediation strategies to assist low-performing students achieve grade-level proficiency in core academic subjects.</p> <p>Step 2. Modify district school board policy to prevent the practice of waiving retention and promotion requirements for the sole purpose of reducing the number of students retained. The board should adhere to promotion policies subsequent to the receipt of student FCAT scores.</p> <p>Step 3. Continue to share effective teaching practices by using district specialists to develop teaching materials, provide training, and coach individual teachers; and using verified expert teachers to tape demonstration lessons, and cataloging the tapes for later use by all district teachers.</p> <p>Step 4. Improve curriculum support for teachers by: revising the district's Scope and Sequence notebooks, which serve as curriculum guides, to include all core subjects, and to incorporate differentiated teaching strategies for students with special needs; and training school level administrators, such as assistant principals, to provide site-based leadership in linking the curriculum with the Sunshine State Standards and grade level expectations.</p> <p>Step 5. Develop and implement a system for feeder pattern schools to identify and address student deficiencies.</p>
Who Is Responsible	District superintendent and school board members; district staff; principals; assistant principals
Time Frame	Summer 2003 through 2003-2004 academic year; ongoing thereafter

**Action Plan 4-8**

<b>We recommend that the Gadsden County School District develop a plan for addressing student support service needs.</b>		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish a district team responsible for developing a student support services plan. Team members should include district, school, and Florida Department of Education employees, as well as community leaders and representatives of state and local children's service providers.
	Step 2.	Conduct a student support services needs assessment, with a methodology that includes reviewing school climate surveys, reviewing disaggregated non-academic data, surveying or interviewing district and school staff, conducting a task analysis of current student support services employees, comparing Gadsden to peer districts and state averages, and using other appropriate assessment methods.
	Step 3.	With direction from the school board, prioritize the student needs to be addressed. Establish student support services goals, objectives and strategies. Assign specific staff with the responsibility of implementing strategies. Devise a system for monitoring progress, and annually report results to the school board.
	Step 4.	Incorporate student support services needs into all district planning and evaluation processes, such as the district strategic plan, school improvement plans, and principal and employee annual appraisals.
	Step 5.	Identify potential resources that could be used to expand services to meet student needs, such as procuring new grant funds, re-training and/or re-assigning existing personnel, collaborating with social work programs of regional higher education institutions, and increasing Medicaid reimbursement for services.
Who Is Responsible	Deputy superintendent of Schools and Instruction; district education program directors; principals, school advisory councils.	
Time Frame	2003-04 school year; ongoing thereafter	

## *Administration and Instructional Technology*

**Action Plan 5-1**

<b>We recommend that the district develop a more comprehensive technology plan that includes goals for administrative technology, measurable objectives, and information on the time and resources needed to achieve goals and objectives.</b>		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish and include goals for administrative technology in the district's technology plan.
	Step 2.	Modify the technology plan to include clearly defined and measurable objectives to better meet the operational needs of schools and the district. Include timelines and expected completion dates for the plan's goals and objectives, and state the expectation of major initiatives and the cost associated with each initiative. Link costs to the district budget.
	Step 3.	Evaluate initiatives outlined in the plan and modify strategies accordingly.
Who Is Responsible	Deputy superintendent	
Time Frame	July 2004	

**Action Plan 5-2**

**We recommend that the district assess the cause of system unreliability and develop plans to address the problems.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Assess the cause of system unreliability and develop recommendations for addressing the problems. Take necessary action if the problems can be fixed with existing resources.
	Step 2.	If funds are not available to immediately address problems with system unreliability, present recommendations to the superintendent and school board.
	Step 3.	Revise the technology plan to implement the recommendations over time.

Who Is Responsible	Deputy superintendent
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Time Frame	July 2004
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**Action Plan 5-3**

**We recommend that the district increase the use of email to communicate with its employees and stakeholders.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Draft a policy regarding use of email to communicate with principals, teachers, other district personnel, and parents. The policy should encourage greater use of email when district employees need to disseminate large amounts of information to a wide audience.
	Step 2.	Present the draft policy to the superintendent for approval.
	Step 3.	Develop a training plan for district employees on the use of email and arrange for training in accordance with the plan.
	Step 4.	Compile and disseminate a list of district email addresses and make this information available on the district intranet and Internet websites.

Who is Responsible	Deputy superintendent
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Time Frame	July 2004
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## ***Personnel Systems and Benefits***

### **Action Plan 6-1**

**In order to better address retention rates, we recommend that the district use exit interviews and climate surveys to better identify and remedy reasons for turnover.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	The district should continue to use the exit interview form and procedures to collect comprehensive information on reasons for separation from employment. The district should include in the employee handbook a summary of available options to employees considering terminating their employment with the district. In addition, the district should develop a form letter to be given to departing teachers that expresses available options they have for a supplemental written portion or face-to-face exit interview with district staff directly to communicate reasons for leaving.
	Step 2.	The assistant superintendent of Personnel and Human Resources, director of K-12 Instruction, and director of Personnel should review and provide suggestions as to how the climate survey questions could be modified or enhanced in an effort to make sure the survey addresses needs or issues concerning all employees.
	Step 3.	The assistant superintendent of Personnel and Human Resources, director of K-12 Instruction, and director of Personnel should employ data driven decision making by using exit interview data and climate survey results in an attempt to identify patterns or reasons for departure from the district and individual schools.
	Step 4.	The assistant superintendent of Personnel and Human Resources, director of K-12 Instruction, director of Personnel should use the information gathered from exit interviews and climate surveys to make recommendations to the superintendent and the board regarding how to reduce turnover.
Who Is Responsible	Assistant superintendent of Personnel and Human Resources, director of K-12 Instruction, director of Personnel	
Time Frame	July 2004	

## *Facilities Construction*

### Action Plan 7-1

**We recommend that the facilities director make an annual presentation to the board, giving a comprehensive overview of the status of district's major construction projects in meeting budget and timeliness objectives.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Within the next three months, schedule a presentation by the facilities director to the school board on the state of major construction projects. Prior to the presentation, determine and submit to the facilities director an information request for the data that the school board requires in order to be able to evaluate the district's performance in meeting major construction budget and timeliness objectives.
	Step 2.	Agenda the presentation, ensuring that there is adequate time for discussion and questions. Schedule further follow-up meetings or workshops as required to ensure that it has adequate time to understand the information received.
	Step 3.	Schedule such presentations annually or more often. This step should be implemented in conjunction with Action Plan 3-1 in Chapter 3 (Performance Accountability).
Who Is Responsible	Gadsden County School Board and facilities director	
Time Frame	December 2004	

## *Facilities Maintenance*

### Action Plan 8-1

**We recommend that the Maintenance Department develop an e-mail work order system and use the system to communicate with schools about when requested work is scheduled to commence and to monitor whether work is completed as scheduled.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop an e-mail work order system. This system should include a simple form that can be printed, saved, or logged by the schools so that they can track the status of their requests.
	Step 2.	Once the Facilities Director has evaluated requested work and scheduled a date to conduct the work, report back to schools via e-mail regarding when their work is scheduled to commence or why it is being delayed.
	Step 3.	Log each work order and scheduled date for completion, and use the log to match requested work orders to completed work orders. Notify the director of work that has not been completed when scheduled.
	Step 4.	Require maintenance employees to sign off on completion of each job and provide this documentation to the Maintenance Department.
	Step 5.	Investigate reasons for delays in completing work on schedule.
	Step 6.	The Facilities Director should meet with maintenance employees to discuss why deviations from scheduled work occur.
Who Is Responsible	Facilities Director, Maintenance Department secretaries, and Information Technology Department	
Time Frame	July 2004	



**Action Plan 8-2**

**We recommend that the Maintenance Department annually survey principals, teachers, and administrative employees regarding their satisfaction with maintenance and custodial work, and use this information to target areas needing improvement.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop survey instruments to assess customer satisfaction with maintenance and custodial work.
	Step 2.	Annually survey principals and a sample of teachers and administrative employees about their satisfaction with maintenance and custodial work.
	Step 3.	Annually report survey results to district and school personnel and maintenance and custodial workers.
	Step 4.	Use survey results to target areas needing improvement and make recommendations to the superintendent and school board about any need for districtwide change.
Who Is Responsible	Facilities Director and Coordinator of Custodial Services	
Time Frame	July 2004	

**Action Plan 8-3**

**We recommend that the district proactively identify, prioritize, and address its worst maintenance problems, particularly in schools that are not planned for closure, using remaining fixed capital outlay funds and other funds available for maintenance.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Conduct assessments of schools to identify serious deferred maintenance problems.
	Step 2.	Solicit input from school principals, head custodians, and maintenance workers regarding serious maintenance problems and make sure that schools have submitted work orders to address these problems.
	Step 3.	Prioritize school maintenance problems and present recommendations to the school board for spending the district's unallocated fixed capital outlay funds and addressing renovation and repair needs during the seven-year period before the district has completed its facility construction plans. <sup>1</sup>
	Step 4.	Establish a school board plan for budgeting the district's unallocated fixed capital outlay funds and addressing renovation and repair needs. Priority should be placed on life, health, and safety issues.
	Step 5.	Incorporate the school board's decisions into the district's facilities repair and renovation planning and budgeting documents, such as the district's facilities five-year work plan.
Who Is Responsible	Facilities Director, Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance, and School Board	
Time Frame	July 2004 for establishing plans	

<sup>1</sup> Subsequent to our fieldwork, the district identified high priority building condition problems and the school board approved a list of projects to address these problems using unallocated fixed capital outlay funds. The district should ensure that these projects are implemented as planned and that projects address the high priority needs identified.

**Action Plan 8-4**

**We recommend that the Maintenance Department establish a standard training program for maintenance and custodial workers.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Review PAEC and vender training opportunities for maintenance and custodial workers.
	Step 2.	Develop a basic set of required training for maintenance and custodial workers, including safety issues such as how to handle chemicals, first aid, and how to prevent back injuries.
	Step 3.	Inform school principals about the need for custodial training.
	Step 4.	Schedule workers for training offered by PAEC and vendors.
	Step 5.	Schedule in-house custodial workshops on how to perform minor maintenance tasks.
Who Is Responsible	Facilities Director and Coordinator of Custodial Services	
Time Frame	July 2004	

**Action Plan 8-5**

**We recommend that the district develop and implement a shared savings energy management plan.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Review successful energy conservation and energy management programs. This would include programs in other school districts and professional energy management and maintenance organizations.
	Step 2.	Develop a district energy management plan in consultation with district stakeholders such as maintenance employees, custodians, site-based administrators, instructional personnel, and utility providers and other experts on energy conservation. The plan should include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a mission statement, objectives, and activities to reduce energy usage, such as sharing in savings</li> <li>▪ an energy audit to determine ways of reducing energy consumption and cost;</li> <li>▪ energy measures to be tracked by facility;</li> <li>▪ energy management training for students, teachers, administrators, and maintenance workers;</li> <li>▪ energy conservation checklists for students, teachers, administrators, and maintenance workers; and</li> <li>▪ incentive programs for schools to promote and reward student and staff for participation.</li> </ul>
	Step 3.	Meet with local utility providers and contact the Department of Community Affairs to discuss the availability of free energy audits.
Who Is Responsible	Facilities Director and Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance	
Time Frame	July 2004	

## ***Food Service Operations***

### **Action Plan 10-1**

**We recommend that food service program monthly budgets be developed at school level.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	The food service director, cafeteria managers, and district finance staff should work together to develop a monthly budget at the school level. Prior financial statements at school level should be used as a starting point.
	Step 2.	The food service director should refine the budgets annually and link budget forecasts to annual program goals.
	Step 3.	Program management should monitor budgets versus financial performance at least quarterly and analyze reasons for variations.

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Who Is Responsible	Food service director and district finance staff
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Time Frame	July 2004
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### **Action Plan 10-2**

**We recommend that the food service program take a more proactive role in managing the program's budget and financial assets.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	With assistance from the district's financial staff, the food service director should collect, review, and analyze program data in order to develop a comprehensive food service program budget that is linked to plans and meets long term program needs. This budget should be to school level to enable appropriate management oversight. The food service director should monitor at least quarterly the financial status of each school's operations and the financial condition of the district program as a whole and take actions as needed to meet program goals and budgets.
	Step 2.	The food service director and assistant superintendent for business and finance should review procedures used to determine the program's fair share of program expenses and develop payment methods by reimbursement to the general fund or direct charges.
	Step 3.	As the annual budget is further developed, commence development and use of a five-year cash flow budget to improve mid range financial planning and program goal attainment.

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Who Is Responsible	Food service director and assistant superintendent for business and finance
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Time Frame	July 2005
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**Action Plan 10-3**

**We recommend that the food service program take several actions to optimize its financial opportunities.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. The food service director should analyze state provided commodity processing contracts to determine optimal financial benefit for the program. Select and implement the most cost effective offerings. Especially consider full use of the pizza rebate program and chicken nugget processors to reduce Donated Food storage and delivery costs and improve customer acceptance.</p> <p>Step 2. The food service director and cafeteria managers should expand a la carte food offerings at all secondary schools to improve program acceptance and improve program financial condition.</p> <p>Step 3. Through attrition, the food service directors should phase-in the “offer versus serve” serving method in all schools and reduce or reallocate staff accordingly. The director should foresee training needs, delegate implementation to cafeteria managers, and periodically monitor implementation of this initiative.</p> <p>Step 4. The food service director and cafeteria managers should analyze the physical appearance and layouts of cafeteria kitchens and dining areas and rearrange or plan renovations of these areas to improve physical appearance and efficiency. Significant changes may need incorporation in goals, plans, and budgets of the food service program.</p> <p>Step 5. The food service director, with the assistance of the Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance, should assess the efficiency and effectiveness of core process functions and activities of the program at least every five years, and document and monitor needed improvements. Special attention should be given to direct delivery versus warehousing of purchased food, items being produced from scratch, procurement methods, providing of employee uniforms, and use of central kitchens to serve satellite schools. Significant efforts should be integrated into program budgets, goals, and strategies.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Food service director, cafeteria managers, Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance
Time Frame	July 2005 and ongoing

## *Cost Control Systems*

**Action Plan 11-1**

**We recommend that the district develop an ethics policy that includes remedies for unethical behavior.**

Action Needed	<p>Step 1. Develop an ethics policy and present the policy to the board for approval.</p> <p>Step 2. Subsequent to board approval and adoption of the policy, all existing and all new employees should be required to sign a statement indicating that they are aware of the ethics policy and its ramifications.</p>
Who Is Responsible	Deputy Superintendent of Schools
Time Frame	July 2004

### Action Plan 11-2

**We recommend that the district develop a process which permits employees to report suspected improprieties without fear of reprisal.**

Action Needed	Step 1:	Develop a policy for the confidential reporting of suspected improprieties and present the policy to the board for approval.
	Step 2:	Subsequent to board approval and adoption of the policy, distribute the newly developed procedures to all employees and post at all work sites.
Who Is Responsible	Deputy Superintendent of Schools	
Time Frame	July 2004	

### Action Plan 11-3

**We recommend that the board establish procedures to ensure that the district promptly takes action to correct findings noted in external financial audits and other monitoring reviews.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	For each audit or monitoring review finding, assign an employee the responsibility to resolve the audit or monitoring report finding in a timely manner.
	Step 2.	Periodically, require the employee responsible for corrective action to report the status of such action to the board.
Who Is Responsible	Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance	
Time Frame	July 2004	

### Action Plan 11-4

**We recommend that the board develop a strategic plan to include a prioritization of long-term and short-term financial and budgetary goals and establish links between their strategic plan objectives and the budget planning process.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	List all strategic plan objectives and rank them in order of importance and cost.
	Step 2.	Ensure that during each budget planning meeting, the strategic plan objectives list is considered.
	Step 3.	After the proposed budget is completed, ensure that all strategic plan objectives are 1) noted as being included in the budget, or 2) reassigned to another budget year within the strategic plan.
Who Is Responsible	Deputy Superintendent of Schools	
Time Frame	July 2004	

### Action Plan 11-5

**We recommend that the district establish measurable financial goals in their strategic plan.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish the financial measures consistent with strategic plan goals.
	Step 2.	Develop criteria for determining achievement of the measures.
	Step 3.	Implement procedures to monitor adherence to the plan.
Who Is Responsible	Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance	
Time Frame	July 2004	

**Action Plan 11-6**

**We recommend that the district conduct annual risk assessments.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Conduct annual risk assessments using district staff.
	Step 2.	If district staff is unable to conduct assessments, develop and distribute a request for proposal for risk assessment services; review proposals for risk assessment services and select a firm that will perform the risk assessment for the district.
	Step 3.	Review the results of the risk assessment, prioritize high-risk activities, and assign responsibility for addressing and resolving prioritized risks.
Who Is Responsible	Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance	
Time Frame	July 2004	

**Action Plan 11-7**

**We recommend that the board strengthen internal control over capital assets to provide for timely posting of detailed subsidiary records and to ensure that a complete physical inventory be properly conducted of all tangible personal property. As an alternative of having district staff conduct the annual inventory, the board may consider contracting with a private vendor to provide this service.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Timely record relevant information from property purchases to the detailed property subsidiary records.
	Step 2.	Conduct an annual inventory of all tangible personal property.
	Step 3.	Compare the results of the tangible personal property inventory with the property records.
	Step 4.	Trace and reconcile discrepancies noted between the tangible personal property inventory and the property records.
Who Is Responsible	Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance	
Time Frame	July 2004	

**Action Plan 11-8**

**We recommend that the district implement a pilot purchasing card program to determine its effectiveness.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Perform an analysis of the purchasing card programs offered by various vendors and the state; then select the program that would be most beneficial to the district.
	Step 2.	Evaluate the district's organizational structure and select specific departments/individuals to participate in the pilot purchasing card program. Those selected should have a genuine need for the purchasing card and already be heavily involved in the purchasing process for their department/site.
	Step 3.	Present the purchasing card program proposal to the board along with revised purchasing policies and procedures to include internal controls needed for the purchasing card program, including measures to be taken by the district for employees who misuse the cards, such as repayment through wage garnishment, termination, and prosecution.
	Step 4.	To test the effectiveness and internal controls of the purchasing card program, implement a pilot program in steps, starting with specific departments with specific restrictions on the cards to allow only purchases that are unique to those departments.
	Step 5.	Update the policies and procedures based on the results of this pilot program.
	Step 6.	If the pilot program is successful, expand the use of the purchasing card program to additional departments/employees and promote greater use of the purchasing cards for purchases under \$750. This will include evaluating and revising daily and monthly card purchase limits so that the purchases can be made. These procedures should address methods by which purchasing cards can be used for purchase requisitions for amounts less than \$750 made by employees who are not assigned purchasing cards and address any purchase restrictions.

Who Is Responsible	Assistant Superintendent of Business and Finance
Time Frame	July 2004

**Action Plan 11-9**

**We recommend that the district prepare a cost analysis of operating the warehouse and compare the district's cost to alternative inventory services.**

Action Needed	Step 1.	Determine the costs (staff salaries, equipment, facility, overhead cost, other) associated with maintaining inventories by review and analysis of accounting records.
	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 recommendations to the superintendent.
	Step 5.	If more beneficial, the board should contract for alternative inventory services.

Who Is Responsible	Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance
Time Frame	July 2004