Sharpening the Pencil

Best Financial Management Practices Review

Alachua County School District

Sharpening the Pencil
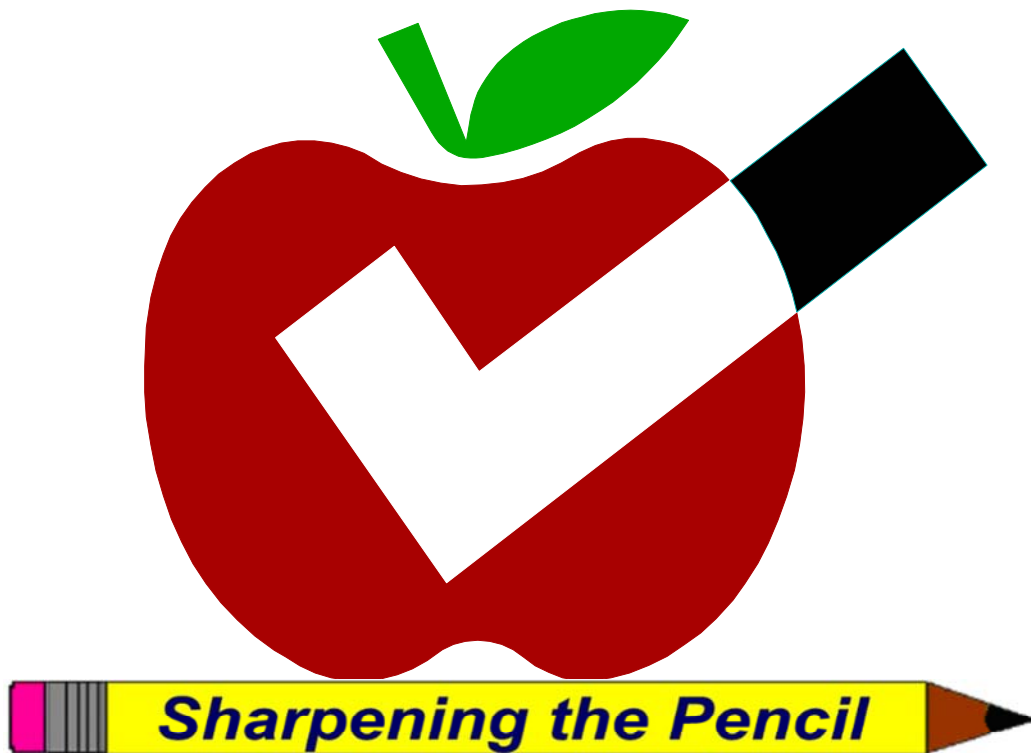
ValienteHernandez
P.A.

CERTIFIED PUBLIC
ACCOUNTANTS

AUDITORS AND
CONSULTANTS

The Florida Legislature

OFFICE OF PROGRAM POLICY ANALYSIS AND GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Gary R. VanLandingham, Interim Director

October 2003

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

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

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

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

Rae Hendling was the contract manager for this review, which was supervised by David Summers. Other OPPAGA staff included Tim Elwell, Mark Frederick, Chuck Henfren, Sara Mendonça-McCoy, Larry Novey, and Martha Wellman. Auditor General staff included John Davisson and Jim Kiedinger under the supervision of David Martin.

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

Sincerely,

Gary R. VanLandingham
Interim Director

GRV/mc

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

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OPPAGA

Digest of the
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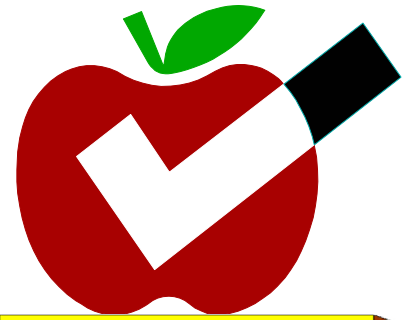
Results in Brief

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 Alachua County School District during Fiscal Year 2002-03.[1] The Alachua County School District currently is using 72% (106 of 148) of the best practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education. The percentage of best practices used by the Collier County School District is comparable to that used by other districts reviewed. The district is using a majority of the best practices in 7 of the 10 areas reviewed. The report contains action plans to address the remaining best practices and to make the district eligible for the Seal of Best Financial Management. (See Exhibit 1.) A detailed listing

of all the best practices that identifies the district's status in relation to each is on page 6 of this report.

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

Best Practice Area (Total Practices)	Is the District Using Individual Best Practices?	
	Yes	No
Management Structures (14)	13	1
Performance Accountability System (3)	1	2
Educational Service Delivery (12)	9	3
Administrative and Instructional Technology (9)	4	5
Personnel Systems and Benefits (11)	6	5
Facilities Construction (24)	21	3
Facilities Maintenance (22)	11	11
Transportation (20)	16	4
Food Service Operations (11)	7	4
Cost Control Systems (22)	18	4
All Areas (148)	**106**	**42**

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 $3,557,723 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.

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[1] This review was conducted by ValienteHernandez, P.A., of Tampa, Florida under contract with OPPAGA.

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

Ways to Save	Projected Five-Year Cost Savings or Increased Revenue
Educational Services Delivery	
• Maximize Medicaid reimbursements (Best Practice 2, page 4-8)	$1,331,945
• Maximize lost/damaged textbook collections (Best Practice 9, page 4-21)	100,318
Facilities Maintenance	
• Improve energy management practices. (Best Practice 15, page 8-20)	1,149,000
Transportation	
• Minimize the bus transportation of students living within two miles of their school who can safely walk to school. (Best Practice 3, page 9-9)	150,000
• Register as a warranty center to reduce "unproductive" maintenance time. (Best Practice 12, page 9-26)	38,500
• Charge the full cost for activity trips to schools. (Best Practice 13, page 9-27)	62,200
• Develop a procedure to ensure that Medicaid reimbursement for qualifying students' transportation is collected. (Best Practice 14, page 9-30)	63,510
Food Service Operations	
• Implement shared manager program. (Best Practice 2, page 10-10)	392,250
• Increase Meal Per Labor Hour Standard. (Best Practice 2, page 10-10)	270,000
TOTALS	**$3,557,723**

Purpose

The purpose of Best Financial Management Practices Reviews is to improve Florida school district management and use of resources and to identify cost savings. [2] Florida law directs 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 Florida law, OPPAGA contracted with ValienteHernandez, P.A., of Tampa, Florida, a private consulting firm, to conduct this review. ValienteHernandez, P.A. was primarily responsible for fieldwork and developing report findings and recommendations. OPPAGA and Auditor General staff monitored the firm throughout the review process to ensure that the best practices and indicators were applied in the district consistent with reviews by consultants and OPPAGA in other districts. OPPAGA and Auditor General staff attended site visits and provided assistance to the consultant during the course of the review, which included report drafting.

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[2] 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.

With 29,662 students, the Alachua County School District is the twenty-fifth largest of the state's 67 school districts. Located in north central Florida, the district operates 59 schools and centers, including 24 elementary schools, 8 middle schools, 7 high schools and 20 other schools.

The consultant's report contains findings related to each best practice and detailed action plans to implement each report recommendation. These action plans were developed with input from the school district and describe the specific steps the district should take if it decides to implement the recommendation within two years. Pursuant to s. 1008.35, *Florida Statutes,* OPPAGA made the final determination on whether the school district is using best practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education based on information in the final report and the independent assessment of the district's use of each best practice.

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

General Overview and District Obligations

Currently, the Alachua County School District is using 72% of the best practices adopted by the Commissioner and at this time is not eligible for a Seal of Best Financial Management. Appendix A of 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 and the consultant will attend this forum.

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

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

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

Conclusions by Best Practice Area

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

Management Structures

The Alachua County School District is using 13 of 14 of the Best Practices in Management Structures. The board and superintendent have well-defined roles and responsibilities and have a sound organizational structure and allocate staff and resources wisely. In addition, the district's planning and budgeting processes allow the district to address needs, and its community involvement efforts serves parents and the business community. To use the remaining best practice standard the district should develop a comprehensive procedural manual.

Performance Accountability System

The Alachua County School District is using one of the three performance accountability best practices. The district reports on the performance of its basic educational programs. To use the remaining best practice standards, and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its performance accountability system, the district should ensure that all goals of its major educational programs, the district should ensure that all programs have

measurable goals. This information then can be used to improve operations and guide development and evaluation of the district's strategic plan.

Educational Service Delivery

The Alachua County School District is using 9 of the 12 educational service delivery best practices. The district effectively uses academic and non-academic data for curriculum planning and decision making and serves students in at-risk, accelerated, and work force development programs. In addition, the district generally provides good instructional support including textbooks, media centers and support services. To use the remaining best practice standards, the district should monitor the placement and evaluation process for Exceptional Student Education services. In addition, the district should seek Medicaid reimbursement for eligible services, ensure that school improvement plans include measurable objectives to guide improvement in student performance, and improve the use of technology as an instructional tool.

Administrative and Instructional Technology

The Alachua County School District is using 4 of the 9 administrative and instructional technology best practices. The district has cost-effectively purchased new technology, maintains a dependable technology infrastructure given available resources, has established policies and ethical standards for using technology, and has good controls to ensure proper access and use of the district's information systems. To use the remaining best practice standards, the district should regularly update and monitor its technology plan, formalize the training processes related to technology, adjust budget allocations within available funding, use the work order system to improve the delivery of support services, expand the use of technology to improve district communications, and establish procedures for analyzing technology purchases and services.

Personnel Systems and Benefits

The Alachua County School District is using 6 of the 11 personnel systems and benefits best practices. The district effectively recruits and hires and evaluates staff and addresses poor performance. The district also maintains personnel records, has good cost containment practices for worker's compensation and benefits and maintains an effective collective bargaining unit. To use the remaining best practice standards, the district should establish performance objectives and routinely assess performance. In addition, the district should compile climate survey information to improve employee support, use turnover data and other information to improve recruitment and retention, enhance training opportunities, develop a mentoring program for career service staff, improve re-evaluation efforts of poorly performing employees,

establish clear criteria and consequences for unacceptable behavior, and develop and institute an absentee policy and monitor use of substitutes.

Facilities Construction

The Alachua County School District is using 21 of the 24 facilities construction best practices. The district does a good job of planning its construction projects, funds projects properly and efficiently, designs projects well, and effectively manages its construction projects. To use the remaining best practice standards, the district should evaluate its facilities operation and performance after three and five years of use, establish and implement accountability measures, and evaluate the program's overall performance against those measures.

Facilities Maintenance

The district is using 11 of the 22 facilities maintenance best practices. The district regularly reviews the organizational structure of its maintenance department, has qualified staff, and district policies and procedures address facilities' health and safety conditions. In addition, budget expenditures comply with spending requirements, costs for large repairs are accurately projected, purchases are cost effective, and the district has a system to prioritize maintenance needs. To use the remaining best practice standards, the district should develop an accountability system that establishes department goals and objectives to assess performance efficiency, solicit customer feedback on service effectiveness, establish work and employee performance standards, improve efforts to prioritize backlog work by using a needs assessment, ensure that employees can access training and staff development opportunities, ensure that reserve funds for unexpected expenses are available, develop a preventive maintenance plan, institute an energy management system, assess privatization opportunities, and increase management efforts to ensure productivity.

Transportation

The Alachua County School District is using 16 of the 20 transportation best practices. The district generally plans its transportation services and organizes its resources effectively, successfully acquires and maintains vehicles, operates a safe system and properly responds to emergencies or other contingencies, and effectively monitors the transportation budget. To use the remaining best practice standards, the district should implement an accountability system based on measurable goals and objectives, improve technological and computer support for maintenance operations, improve training programs for its maintenance staff, and research privatization and collaborative agreements within the community.

Food Service Operations

The Alachua County School District is using 7 of 11 best practices for food service operations. The food service program has developed comprehensive procedures manuals, performs sound cash and account management, optimizes its financial opportunities, uses some measures and benchmarks to evaluate program performance, complies with federal, state, and district policies, and takes steps to ensure that customer needs are met. To use the remaining best practices standards, the district should develop clearly stated goals and objectives, clarify its leadership and organizational structure and responsibilities, systematically identify training needs to improve use of limited training resources, and develop performance standards that can be used to improve and direct program changes and increase efficiencies.

Cost Control Systems

The Alachua County School District is using 18 of the 22 best practices in cost control systems. The district effectively manages cash, capital assets, debts, risks, inventory and purchasing. In addition, the district obtains and uses financial information through its data systems and from external audits, has established internal control procedures, ties its budget to the strategic plan, and has up-to-date fiscal policies and procedures. To use all the best practice standards and enhance the performance, efficiency and effectiveness of its cost controls systems, the district should cross-train individuals in all the accounting functions, establish a written policy and procedure for the reporting of suspected improprieties, and provide and maintain an adequate fund balance guided by the district's strategic plan and budgeting process.

Alachua County School District
Best Financial Management Practices

Currently, the Alachua County School District is using 72% (106 of 148) of the best practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education, and at this time, is not eligible for a Seal of Best Financial Management. The detailed list below contains all the best practices and identifies the district's current status in relation to each.

Best Practices	*Is the District Using Best Practices?*		
MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
1. The roles and responsibilities of the board and superintendent have been clearly delineated, and board members and the superintendent have 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.		✓	2-10
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.	✓		2-11
5. The district's organizational structure has clearly defined units and lines of authority that minimize administrative costs.	✓		2-12
6. The district periodically reviews its administrative staffing and makes changes to eliminate unnecessary positions and improve operating efficiency.	✓		2-14
7. The superintendent and school board exercise effective oversight of the district's financial resources.	✓		2-15
8. The district has clearly assigned school principals the authority they need to effectively manage their schools while adhering to districtwide policies and procedures.	✓		2-17
9. The district has a multi-year strategic plan with annual goals and measurable objectives based on identified needs, projected enrollment, and revenues.	✓		2-18
10. The district has a system to accurately project enrollment.	✓		2-19
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.	✓		2-20
12. When necessary, the district considers options to increase revenue.	✓		2-21
13. The district actively involves parents and guardians in the district's decision making and activities.	✓		2-22
14. The district actively involves business partners and community organizations in the district's decision making and activities.	✓		2-23

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?		

PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
1. The district has clearly stated goals and measurable objectives that can be achieved within budget for each major educational and operational program. These major programs are • Vocational/Technical Education, English for Speakers of Other Languages Education, Facilities Construction, Facilities Maintenance, Transportation, Food Services, and Safety and Security. [3]		✓	3-5
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.		✓	3-10
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.	✓		3-11

EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
1. District administrators use both academic and nonacademic data to improve K-12 education programs.	✓		4-7
2. The district provides effective and efficient Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs for students with disabilities and students who are gifted. [4]		✓	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]. [5]	✓		4-12
4. The district provides an appropriate range of accelerated programs (such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and Dual Enrollment).	✓		4-14
5. The district provides effective and efficient workforce development programs (such as vocational-technical, adult basic education, and adult high school programs).	✓		4-15
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.		✓	4-17
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	✓		4-18
8. The district's organizational structure and staffing of educational programs minimizes administrative layers and processes.	✓		4-20
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.	✓		4-21

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

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

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

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?		

EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
10. The district has sufficient school library or media centers to support instruction.	✓		4-22
11. The district utilizes instructional technology in the classroom to enhance curriculum and improve student achievement.		✓	4-23
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.	✓		4-23

ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
1. The district has a comprehensive technology plan that provides direction for administrative and instructional technology decision making.		✓	5-6
2. The district acquires technology in a cost-effective manner that will best meet its instructional and administrative needs. [6]	✓		5-8
3. District and school-based staff receive professional development training for all technologies used in the district.		✓	5-10
4. The district provides timely and cost-effective technical support that enables educators and district staff to successfully implement technology in the workplace.		✓	5-12
5. The district maintains a dependable, standards-based infrastructure employing strategies that cost-effectively maximize network and Internet access and performance.	✓		5-14
6. The district uses technology to improve communication.		✓	5-15
7. The district has written policies that apply safe, ethical, and appropriate use practices that comply with legal and professional standards.	✓		5-15
8. The district has established general controls in the areas of access, systems development and maintenance, documentation, operations, and physical security to promote the proper functioning of the information systems department.	✓		5-16
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.		✓	5-17

PERSONNEL SYSTEMS AND BENEFITS	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
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. [7]		✓	6-7

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

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

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

PERSONNEL SYSTEMS AND BENEFITS	**YES**	**NO**	**PAGE**
3. The district provides a comprehensive staff development program to improve student achievement and to achieve and maintain high levels of productivity and employee performance among non-instructional, instructional, and administrative employees. [8]		✓	6-9
4. The district's system for formally evaluating employees improves and rewards excellent performance and productivity, and identifies and addresses performance that does not meet the district's expectations for the employee.	✓		6-12
5. The district ensures that employees who repeatedly fail to meet the district's performance expectations, or whose behavior or job performance is potentially harmful to students, are promptly removed from contact with students, and that the appropriate steps are taken to terminate the person's employment. [9]		✓	6-12
6. The district has efficient and cost-effective system for managing absenteeism and the use of substitute teachers and other substitute personnel.		✓	6-14
7. The district maintains personnel records in an efficient and readily accessible manner.	✓		6-16
8. The district uses cost containment practices for its Workers' Compensation Program.	✓		6-17
9. The district uses cost-containment practices for its employee benefits programs, including health insurance, dental insurance, life insurance, disability insurance, and retirement.	✓		6-17
10. The district's human resource program is managed effectively and efficiently.		✓	6-19
11. For classes of employees that are unionized, the district maintains an effective collective bargaining process.	✓		6-21

FACILITIES CONSTRUCTION	**YES**	**NO**	**PAGE**
1. The district has effective long-range planning processes. [10]	✓		7-7
2. When developing the annual five-year facilities work plan the district evaluates alternatives to minimize the need for new construction.	✓		7-8
3. The five-year facilities work plan establishes budgetary plans and priorities.	✓		7-11

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

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

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

  Evidence that a district is performing this best practice should include

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

[10] Long-range covers 5-20 years out.

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?		
FACILITIES CONSTRUCTION	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
4. The school board ensures responsiveness to the community through open communication about the construction program and the five-year facilities work plan.	✓		7-11
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. [11]	✓		7-15
10. The architectural design fulfills the building specification needs as determined by the district.	✓		7-16
11. New construction, remodeling, and renovations incorporate effective safety features.	✓		7-17
12. The district minimizes construction and maintenance and operations costs through the use of cost-effective designs, prototype school designs, and frugal construction practices.	✓		7-17
13. The district has effective management processes for construction projects.	✓		7-18
14. District planning provides realistic time frames for implementation that are coordinated with the opening of schools.	✓		7-19
15. All projects started after March 1, 2002, comply with the Florida Building Code.	✓		7-20
16. The district requires appropriate inspection of all school construction projects.	✓		7-20
17. The district retains appropriate professionals to assist in facility planning, design, and construction.	✓		7-21
18. The district follows generally accepted and legal contracting practices to control costs.	✓		7-21
19. The district minimizes changes to facilities plans after final working drawings are initiated in order to control project costs.	✓		7-22
20. The architect recommends payment based on the percentage of work completed. A percentage of the contract is withheld pending completion of the project.	✓		7-22
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.	✓		7-23

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

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?		

FACILITIES CONSTRUCTION	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
22. The district conducts comprehensive building evaluations at the end of the first year of operation and regularly during the next three to five years to collect information about building operation and performance.		✓	7-23
23. The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the construction program.		✓	7-25
24. The district regularly evaluates facilities construction operations based on established benchmarks and implements improvements to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.		✓	7-25

FACILITIES MAINTENANCE	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
1. The district's maintenance and operations department has a mission statement and goals and objectives that are established in writing.		✓	8-7
2. The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance and efficiency of the maintenance and operations program.		✓	8-8
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.		✓	8-11
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.	✓		8-11
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.	✓		8-16
10. The district accurately projects cost estimates of major maintenance projects.	✓		8-17
11. The board maintains a maintenance reserve fund to handle one-time expenditures necessary to support maintenance and operations.		✓	8-17
12. The district minimizes equipment costs through purchasing practices.	✓		8-18
13. The district provides maintenance and operations department staff the tools and equipment required to accomplish their assigned tasks.	✓		8-18
14. The district uses proactive maintenance practices to reduce maintenance costs.		✓	8-19
15. The maintenance and operations department identifies and implements strategies to contain energy costs.	✓		8-20
16. The district has an energy management system in place, and the system is maintained at original specifications for maximum effectiveness.		✓	8-22

Digest: Best Financial Management Practices Review

Best Practices		*Is the District Using Best Practices?*	

FACILITIES MAINTENANCE	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
17. District personnel regularly review maintenance and operation's costs and services and evaluate the potential for outside contracting and privatization.		✓	8-23
18. A computerized control and tracking system is used to accurately track work orders and inventory.		✓	8-24
19. The maintenance and operations department has a system for prioritizing maintenance needs uniformly throughout the district.	✓		8-25
20. District policies and procedures clearly address the health and safety conditions of facilities.	✓		8-26
21. The school district complies with federal and state regulatory mandates regarding facility health and safety conditions.	✓		8-27
22. The district is aware of and prepared for the permitting and inspection requirements of the Florida Building Code.	✓		8-27

TRANSPORTATION	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
1. The district coordinates long-term planning and budgeting for student transportation within the context of district and community planning.	✓		9-8
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.	✓		9-9
3. The transportation office plans, reviews, and establishes bus routes and stops to provide cost-efficient student transportation services for all students who qualify for transportation. [12]	✓		9-9
4. The organizational structure and staffing levels of the district's transportation program minimizes administrative layers and processes.	✓		9-14
5. The district maintains an effective staffing level in the vehicle maintenance area and provides support for vehicle maintenance staff to develop its skills.		✓	9-14
6. The district effectively and efficiently recruits and retains the bus drivers and attendants it needs.	✓		9-16
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.	✓		9-18
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.	✓		9-19
9. The district provides timely routine servicing for buses and other district vehicles, as well as prompt response for breakdowns and other unforeseen contingencies.	✓		9-22
10. The district ensures that fuel purchases are cost-effective and that school buses and other vehicles are efficiently supplied with fuel.	✓		9-23
11. The district maintains facilities that are conveniently situated to provide sufficient and secure support for vehicle maintenance and other transportation functions.	✓		9-24

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

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?		

TRANSPORTATION	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
12. The district maintains an inventory of parts, supplies, and equipment needed to support transportation functions that balances the concerns of immediate need and inventory costs.	✓		9-26
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.	✓		9-27
14. The district provides efficient transportation services for exceptional students in a coordinated fashion that minimizes hardships to students.	✓		9-30
15. The district ensures that staff acts promptly and appropriately in response to any accidents or breakdowns	✓		9-32
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.	✓		9-33
17. The district provides appropriate technological and computer support for transportation functions and operations.		✓	9-34
18. The district monitors the fiscal condition of transportation functions by regularly analyzing expenditures and reviewing them against the budget.	✓		9-38
19. The district has reviewed the prospect for privatizing transportation functions, as a whole or in part.		✓	9-38
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.		✓	9-40

FOOD SERVICE OPERATIONS	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
1. The program has developed strategic or operational plans that are consistent with district plans, the program budget, and approved by the district.		✓	10-8
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.		✓	10-10
3. Program management has developed training designed to meet basic program needs as well as improve food services, both based on a needs assessment.		✓	10-14
4. Program management has developed comprehensive procedures manuals that are kept current.	✓		10-15
5. The district performs sound cash and account management.	✓		10-16
6. District and program management optimizes its financial opportunities.	✓		10-17
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.		✓	10-19
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.	✓		10-19

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?		

FOOD SERVICE OPERATIONS	**_YES_**	**_NO_**	**_PAGE_**
9. District and program administrators effectively manage costs of the food services program and use performance measures, benchmarks, and budgets on a regular basis to evaluate performance and use the analysis for action or change.	✓		10-20
10. The food service program and district complies with federal state and district policy.	✓		10-21
11. The district conducts activities to ensures that customer needs are met and acts to improve services and food quality where needed.	✓		10-22

COST CONTROL SYSTEMS	**_YES_**	**_NO_**	**_PAGE_**
1. The district periodically analyzes the structure and staffing of its financial services organization.		✓	11-8
2. Management has developed and distributed written procedures for critical accounting processes and promotes ethical financial management practices.		✓	11-9
3. The district has adequate financial information systems that provide useful, timely, and accurate information.	✓		11-10
4. District financial staff analyzes significant expenditure processes to ensure they are appropriately controlled.	✓		11-11
5. The district has established adequate internal controls.	✓		11-11
6. Management proactively responds to identified internal control weaknesses and takes immediate steps to correct the weaknesses.	✓		11-12
7. The district produces an annual budget that is tied to the strategic plan and provides useful and understandable information to users.	✓		11-13
8. Management analyzes strategic plans for measurable objectives or measurable results.		✓	11-13
9. The district ensures that it receives an annual external audit and uses the audit to improve its operations.	✓		11-14
10. The district has an effective internal audit function and uses the audits to improve its operations. [13]		✓	11-14
11. The district ensures that audits of internal funds and discretely presented component units (foundations and charter schools) are performed timely.	✓		11-15
12. The district periodically reviews cash management activities, banking relationships, investment performance, and considers alternatives.	✓		11-16
13. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective management of capital assets.	✓		11-17
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.	✓		11-18
16. The district ensures that significant debt financings meet strategic plan objectives.	✓		11-18

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

Best Practices	Is the District Using Best Practices?		
COST CONTROL SYSTEMS	*YES*	*NO*	*PAGE*
17. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective risk management	✓		11-19
18. District staff periodically monitors the district's compliance with various laws and regulations related to risk management.	✓		11-19
19. The district prepares appropriate written cost and benefit analyses for insurance coverage.	✓		11-20
20. The district has established written policies and procedures to take maximum advantage of competitive bidding, volume discounts, and special pricing agreements.	✓		11-20
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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 Introduction

Overview

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. OPPAGA has contracted this review to ValienteHernandez P.A. As illustrated in Exhibit 1-1, the practices addressing district performance in 10 broad areas.

Exhibit 1-1
Best Financial Management Practices Review Areas

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

Districts found to be using the Best Financial Management Practices are 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 action plan for meeting best practice standards within two years. The district school board must vote whether or not to implement this action plan.

Methodology ———————————————————

ValienteHernandez P.A. 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 Alachua County School District and public schools. The evaluators interviewed district administrators and personnel, held one public forum, conducted focus groups with principals and teachers, and attended school board and School Advisory Committee meetings. Evaluators also gathered and reviewed many program documents, district financial data, data on program activities, and data on student performance.

To put Alachua's programs and activities in context with other Florida school districts, ValienteHernandez P.A. gathered information from five peer districts around the state: Bay, Collier, Lake, Marion, and St. Lucie. 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 ———————————————————

As of July 1, 2001, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that the total population of Alachua County was 218,795. The county's population increased 20.5% between 1990 and 2000, which was slower than the state's growth rate of 23.5% during that same time period. The major population centers include Gainesville (the county seat), Archer, Newberry, Waldo, and Hawthorne.

Of the county's population, 98.0% consider themselves to be one race, while the remaining 2.0% consider themselves multi-racial. The largest percentage (69.7%) of the population is white, with persons of Hispanic or Latino origin comprising 3.8% of the population, a fraction of the statewide figure of 16.8%. In addition, 19.3% of the county's residents are Black or African American, which is slightly greater than the statewide figure of 14.6%. These percentages are similar to the racial/ethnic composition of the student population.

About one fifth (20.2%) of Alachua County's population is of school age (5 to 18 years old) while an additional 5.1% are less than five years old. By contrast, 9.6% of the county's population is 65 years old or older. Approximately 88.1% of the county's residents aged 25 years or older are high school graduates, while 38.7% have graduated from college. These percentages are higher than the statewide figures of 50.8% and 12.4%, respectively. This means that the level of educational attainment in Alachua County is higher than it is across the state.

Alachua County's per capita income in 2000 was $24,507, which was $3,257 below the state average. As shown in Exhibit 1-2, the per capita income of Alachua County residents has been consistently lower than the per capita income of the state as a whole.

Exhibit 1-2
Per Capita Income of Alachua County Residents
Was $3,257 Below the State Average in 2000
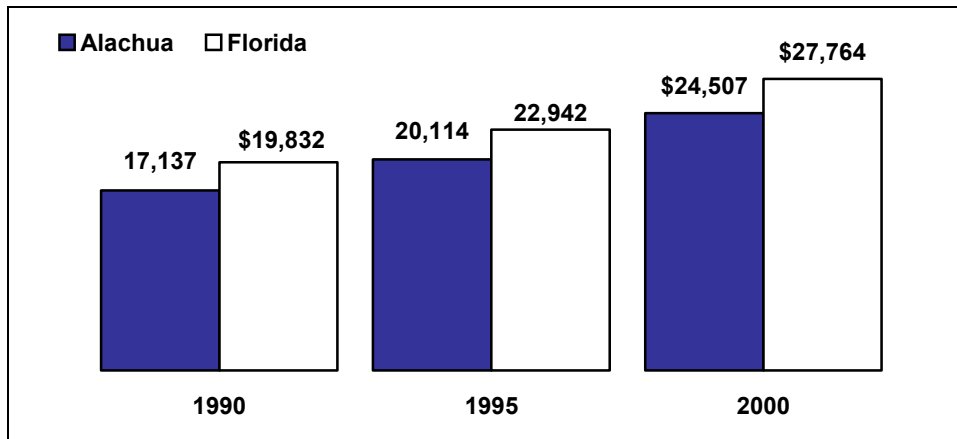
Source: Florida Research and Economic Database, 2003.

While 12.2% of the county's residents live below the poverty level, a larger percentage of the county's children (16.9%) live below the poverty level. These figures are higher than for the state as a whole. This corresponds with the relatively high percentage of school children that are eligible for a free or reduced price lunch.

The unemployment rate in Alachua County has been slightly higher than the state's rate for the past five years. This suggests that students who graduate from high school in Alachua County may have more difficulty finding employment than graduates in other parts of the state. Alachua County has a civilian workforce of 113,195 people. The county's primary sources of employment include professional, scientific, management, administrative and waste management services. The major employers of the school district have an influence on the workforce development programs offered by the district.

School District Profile

The district oversees 59 schools and centers, as shown in Exhibit 1-3.

Exhibit 1-3
Alachua County Oversees 59 Schools

Number and Type of School		
24 - Elementary Schools	6 - Other Types of Schools	10 - Charter Schools
8 - Middle Schools	0 - Vocational Schools	0 - Exceptional Student Education Schools
7 - High Schools	0 - Adult Schools	4 - Juvenile Justice Facility Schools

Source: Alachua County School District, June 2003.

With 29,662 students in 2001-02, the Alachua County School District is the twenty-fifth largest school district in the state. The student population growth has fluctuated between 1997-98 and 2001-02, for a total net decrease of 1.35%, as shown in Exhibit 1-4. This rate contrasts with the 8.94% increase in enrollment across the state.

Exhibit 1-4
Enrollment Growth in Alachua Has Fluctuated Over the Past Five Years
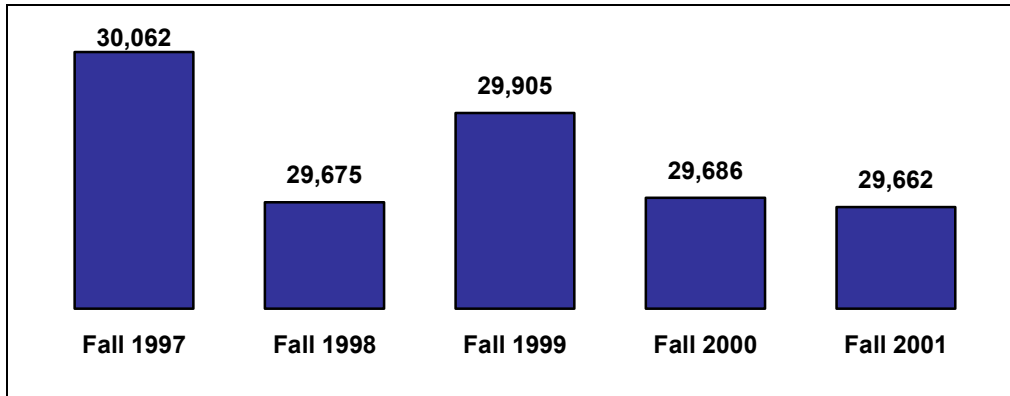
Source: Florida Department of Education, Profiles of School Districts (1997-01), LEA Profiles 2002-03.

The Alachua County School District expended more than $229 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

Revenues and Expenditures	Total
Revenues	
Federal Direct	$5,033,664
Federal Through State	22,167,120
State	109,860,443
Local	76,863,059
Other	0
Total Revenues	**$213,924,286**
Expenditures	
Instruction	$97,736,480
Pupil Personnel Services	13,106,455
Instructional Media Services	4,180,561
Instruction and Curriculum Development Services	9,903,961
Instructional Staff Training	1,726,487
Board of Education	425,360
General Administration	1,085,378
School Administration	10,250,974
Facilities Acquisition and Construction	815,073
Fiscal Services	1,295,505
Food Services	10,057,317
Central Services	4,651,639
Pupil Transportation Services	7,834,514
Operation of Plant	14,931,456
Maintenance of Plant	4,415,071
Community Services	2,470,890
Other	
Fixed Capital Outlay:	
Facilities Acquisition and Construction	22,897,287
Other Capital Outlay	2,093,152
Debt Service:	
Redemption of Principal	12,178,378
Interest and Fiscal Charges	7,714,214
Total Expenditures	**$229,770,148**
Excess (Deficiency) of Revenue Over Expenditure	**($15,845,862)**
Other financing sources:	
Operating Transfers In	$3,585,593
Insurance Loss Recoveries	116,881
Operating Transfers Out	3,585,593
Total other financing sources	$5,147,000
Net Change in Fund Balance	**(10,581,983)**
Fund Balance, June 30, 2001	**71,477,722**
Adjustment to Fund Balance	**17,593**
Fund Balances, June 30, 2002	**$60,913,333**

Source: Florida Department of Education, Superintendent's Annual Financial Report (ESE 145), District School Board of Alachua County for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2002.

As Exhibit 1-6 illustrates, the percentage of administrators and instructional staff are similar in the Alachua 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	Teacher Aides to Classroom Teachers [1]	Guidance to Students
Alachua	1: 12.55	1: 14.78	1: 29.6	1: 17.37	1: 3.98	1: 385.22
Bay	1: 13.57	1: 15.42	1: 29.17	1: 16.98	1: 3.22	1: 347.44
Collier	1: 11.37	1: 13.11	1: 25.71	1: 18.34	1: 2.77	1: 317.52
Lake	1: 14.04	1: 15.77	1: 30.60	1: 18.99	1: 4.06	1: 403.65
Marion	1: 12.84	1: 14.17	1: 29.36	1: 17.10	1: 2.76	1: 517.5
St. Lucie	1: 17.90	1: 20.43	1: 37.40	1: 15.66	1: 4.27	1: 368.51
State	**1: 14.45**	**1: 16.20**	**1: 29.64**	**1: 18.26**	**1: 4.28**	**1: 455.37**

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

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

Exhibit 1-7
Alachua County School District Employed 4,026 Staff in Year 2001-02

Full-Time Employees	Number	Percentage
Administrators	136	3%
Instructional	2,011	50%
Support	1,879	47%
Total	**4,026**	**100.0%**

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

The Alachua County School District faces a number of distinct challenges. The district has a rural population that is distributed throughout the district in challenging feeder patterns. In addition, the district is experiencing a demographic shift in which the overall county population is increasing, but student enrollment is decreasing. Finally, as home to the state's largest university with approximately 40,000 university students, there is a segment of the population that is highly educated, but also transient. Many of the challenges and advantages faced by this district will be discussed throughout this review.

2 Management Structures

Summary —————————————————————————

The Alachua County School District is using 13 of 14 of the management structures best practices. The board and superintendent have well-defined roles and responsibilities and has a sound organizational structure and allocates staff and resources wisely. In addition, the district's planning and budgeting processes allow the district to address needs, and community involvement efforts serves parents and the business community. To use the remaining best practice standard and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its management structures, the district should develop a comprehensive procedural manual.

Background —————————————————————————

The Alachua County School District's management structure is a standard hierarchical structure with five elected board members who are responsible for policy-setting and an appointed superintendent. The district's board members are elected at-large, although they represent specific districts within the county. Each member is elected for a four-year term. Two members are elected at the time of the presidential general election and three are elected at the time of the gubernatorial election.

The district elected three new board members in December 2002 during the primary elections. All three recently elected board members are serving for the first time and of the two others, one is serving a third term and the other a first term. Exhibit 2-1 shows the length of time board members have served and their previous experience.

Exhibit 2-1
Alachua County School District Board Members' Term of Service as of April 2003

Board Member	Time Served	Background
1	7 years	Elected to first term in 1996; reelected in 2000; up for reelection in 2004
2	2 years	Elected to first term in 2000; up for reelection in 2004
3	3 months	Elected to first term in 2002
4	3 months	Elected to first term in 2002
5	3 months	Elected to first term in 2000

Source: Alachua County School District, March 2003.

The current superintendent is a Certified Public Accountant with a doctorate in education. Working in education her entire professional career, she was appointed in October 2000. The superintendent is the

chief executive and administrative officer of the board and, as such, is responsible for organizing the district's administration. Exhibits 2-2 through 2-5 illustrate the current district-level administrative structure. The district's school-level administration is composed of the principals and assistant principals of the district's 24 elementary schools, 8 middle schools, 7 high schools, and 7 educational centers.

Exhibit 2-2
The Alachua County School District's
Organizational Structure Effective July 2003

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                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │  School Board   │
                    └────────┬────────┘
    ┌──────────────────┐     │
    │  Board Attorney  ├─────┤
    └──────────────────┘     │
                    ┌────────┴────────┐
                    │  Superintendent │
                    └────────┬────────┘
    ┌──────────────────┐     │    ┌──────────────────────────┐
    │  Staff Attorney  ├─────┼────┤ Assistant to Superintendent│
    └──────────────────┘     │    │   for Community and       │
                             │    │    School Relations        │
    ┌──────────────────┐     │    └──────────────────────────┘
    │ Public Relations ├─────┤
    │    Specialist    │     │
    └──────────────────┘     │
    ┌──────────────────┐     │    ┌──────────────────────────┐
    │Deputy Superintendent│  │    │  Deputy Superintendent   │
    │ Student Support and ├──┴────┤ Planning, Budgeting, and │
    │ Curriculum Services │       │  Systems Accountability  │
    └─────────┬──────────┘        └──────────────────────────┘
    ┌─────────┴──────────┐
    │  School Principals │
    └────────────────────┘
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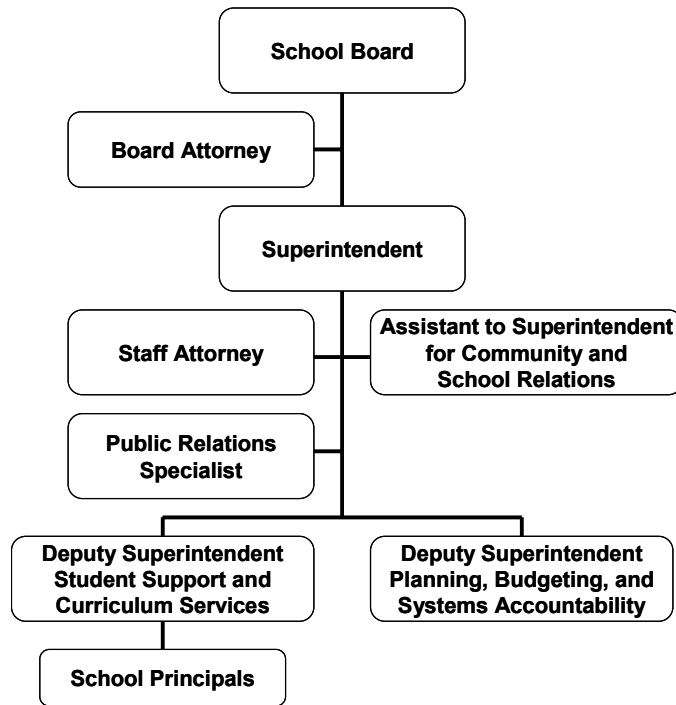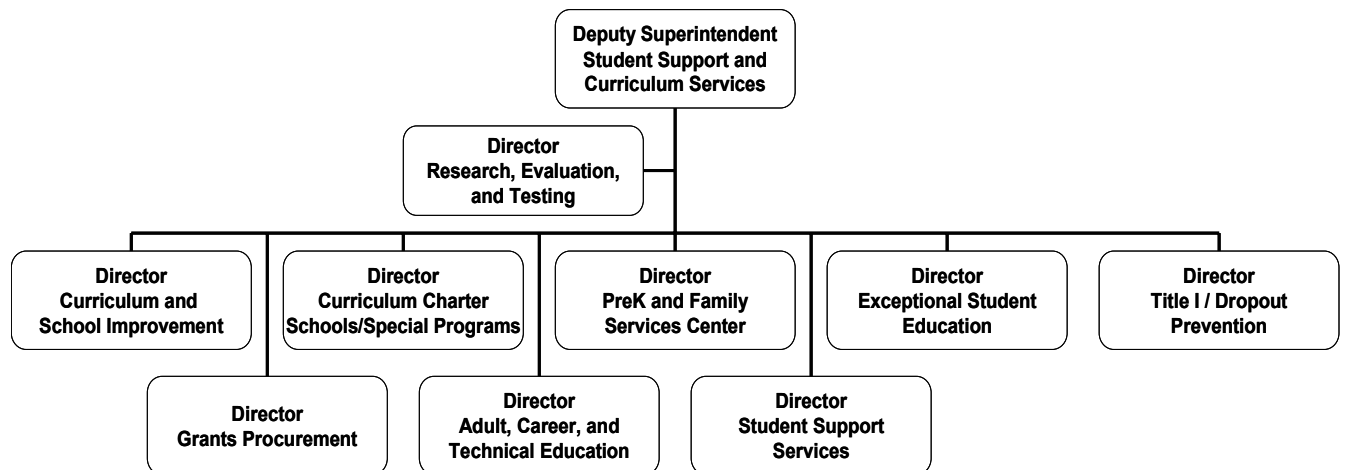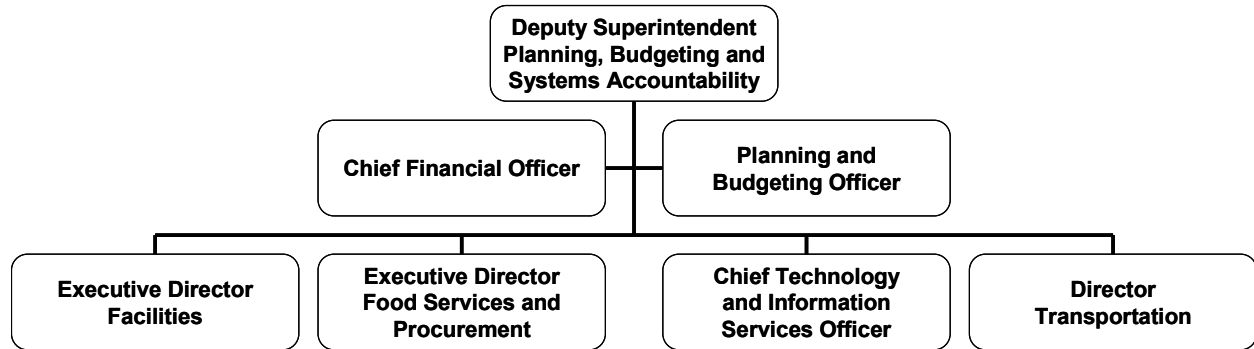
Source: Alachua County School District, May 2003.

Exhibit 2-3
Office of the Deputy Superintendent Student Support and Curriculum Services

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                          ┌─────────────────────┐
                          │ Deputy Superintendent│
                          │  Student Support and │
                          │  Curriculum Services │
                          └──────────┬──────────┘
              ┌─────────────────┐    │
              │    Director      │    │
              │Research, Evaluation,├─┤
              │   and Testing    │    │
              └─────────────────┘    │
  ┌──────────┬──────────┬───────────┼───────────┬──────────────┐
┌─────────┐┌─────────┐┌─────────┐┌──────────┐┌──────────┐
│Director ││Director ││Director ││ Director ││ Director │
│Curriculum││Curriculum││PreK and ││Exceptional││Title I / │
│and School││Charter  ││Family   ││ Student  ││Dropout   │
│Improvement││Schools/││Services ││Education ││Prevention│
│         ││Special  ││Center   ││          ││          │
│         ││Programs ││         ││          ││          │
└─────────┘└─────────┘└─────────┘└──────────┘└──────────┘
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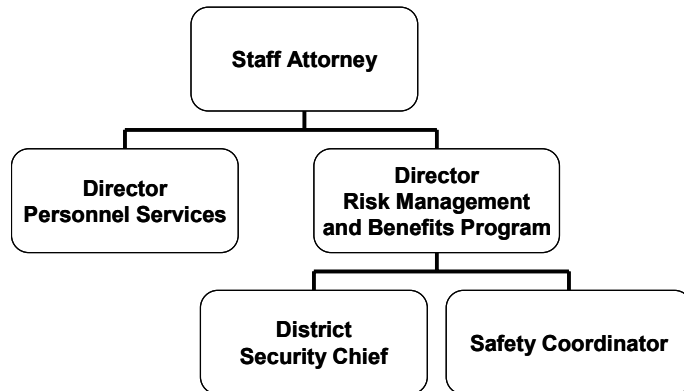| Director Grants Procurement | Director Adult, Career, and Technical Education | Director Student Support Services |

Source: Alachua County School District, May 2003.

Exhibit 2-4
Office of the Deputy Superintendent Planning, Budgeting, and Systems Accountability

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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │   Deputy Superintendent  │
                    │  Planning, Budgeting and │
                    │  Systems Accountability  │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
             ┌────────────────────┬────────────────────┐
    ┌──────────────────┐              ┌──────────────────┐
    │ Chief Financial  │              │   Planning and   │
    │     Officer      │              │ Budgeting Officer│
    └──────────────────┘              └──────────────────┘
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Executive Director Facilities	Executive Director Food Services and Procurement	Chief Technology and Information Services Officer	Director Transportation

Source: Alachua County School District, May 2003.

Exhibit 2-5
Office of the Staff Attorney

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            ┌──────────────────┐
            │  Staff Attorney  │
            └──────────────────┘
        ┌──────────┴──────────┐
┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
│   Director   │      │     Director     │
│  Personnel   │      │ Risk Management  │
│   Services   │      │ and Benefits     │
│              │      │    Program       │
└──────────────┘      └──────────────────┘
                    ┌────────┴────────┐
            ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────────┐
            │   District   │  │      Safety      │
            │ Security Chief│ │   Coordinator    │
            └──────────────┘  └──────────────────┘
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Source: Alachua County School District, May 2003.

The district's budget has fluctuated over the last few years and the general fund expenditures have been higher than district revenues, resulting in an unreserved fund balance considerably below the recommended 4% of the recurring expenditure budget (see Exhibit 2-8, Best Practice 7 of this chapter). Exhibits 2-6 and 2-7 illustrate the district's total revenues and expenditures over the last three years.

School year 2001-02 presented several financial challenges to the district, including a declining economy resulting from the impact of September 11. In response, the district developed a Budget Stabilization and Cost Containment Plan, to be carried out in two phases, which included budget adjustments in excess of $10 million dollars. The district surveyed school staff and administrators and compiled information to offer the school board suggestions on implementing budget cuts and to address the issue of inadequate funds. The board implemented the following recommendations:

- canceled the seventh period in high schools;
- eliminated 37 administrative and professional positions;
- used capital outlay and catastrophic reserve monies to fund recurring maintenance;

- eliminated or reduced program funding for public school technology, teacher retention and recruitment, teacher training, full service schools, adult handicapped, workforce development, and instructional materials; and,

- implemented a hiring freeze.

The district's objective was to keep the budget reductions from directly affecting the classroom and students. Phase I addressed $10 million in state budget cuts. Phase II was completed in April 2002 and eliminated 30.5 instructional positions through attrition and an additional 37 administrative and professional positions through attrition and reassignment. In April 2003, the district proposed a major restructuring that included staff reductions, with 12 administrative positions eliminated, 13 administrative positions reclassified, and 11 support professional/technical positions eliminated or reclassified.

Presently, the district is limited in its ability to raise revenues via property taxes because 52% of the county's property is owned by the state and off the tax rolls. This means the relative contribution effort from local taxpayers is higher, while the total property tax revenue is relatively low.

Debt service for Certificates of Participation (COPS) issues requires a large portion of the Capital Outlay millage. Consequently, items that previously were purchased with capital funds must now be purchased from the operating budget. A November 2001 Florida Association of District School Superintendents (FADSS) review confirmed this situation. That review also indicated that the district was beginning to exhibit characteristics of other districts that have developed serious economic problems.

Exhibit 2-6
The Alachua County School District's Total Revenues Over the Past Three Years

Revenue	Fiscal Year		
	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02
Federal direct	$4,782,634	$6,137,017	$5,033,664
Federal through state	16,088,085	24,446,273	22,167,120
State sources	112,647,735	114,366,293	109,860,443
Local sources	69,276,762	68,616,547	76,863,059
Total Revenue	**$202,795,216**	**$213,566,130**	**$213,924,286**

Source: Alachua County School District, Oct. 2002. Amounts for fiscal year 2001-02 are per the Florida DOE Superintendent's Annual Financial Report (ESE 145) District School Board of Alachua County for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2002.

Exhibit 2-7
Alachua County School District Total Expenditures

Expenditures	Fiscal Year		
	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02
Current—Education:			
Instruction	$ 98,760,597	$ 94,085,611	$ 97,736,480
Pupil Personnel Services	11,843,793	12,398,511	13,106,455
Instructional Media Services	4,107,097	3,930,289	4,180,561
Instruction and Curriculum Development Services	9,994,313	12,647,344	815,073
Instructional Staff Training	2,487,429	2,921,882	1,726,487
Board of Education	517,828	550,455	425,360
General Administration	897,205	1,055,820	1,085,378
School Administration	9,707,527	9,536,858	10,250,974
Facilities Acquisition and Construction	22,012,193	7,695,882	9,301,787
Fiscal Services	1,047,758	1,197,314	1,295,505
Food Services	9,377,800	9,399,264	10,057,317
Central Services	5,385,970	6,588,774	4,651,639
Pupil Transportation Services	7,404,402	7,686,367	7,834,514
Operation of Plant	14,650,345	14,377,485	14,931,456
Maintenance of Plant	4,121,308	4,239,184	4,415,071
Community Services	3,152,756	3,003,002	2,470,890
Debt Service:			
Principal	10,765,698	10,850,750	12,178,378
Interest and Fiscal Charges	9,837,305	7,739,720	37,714,214
Fixed Capital Outlay:			
Facilities Acquisition and Construction	44,567,792	50,934,736	22,897,287
Other Capital Outlay	6,863,701	4,350,232	2,093,152
Total Expenditures	**$277,502,817**	**$265,189,481**	**$229,770,148**

Source: Alachua County School District, October 2002. Amounts for fiscal year 2001-02 are per the Florida Department of Education Superintendent's Annual Financial Report (ESE 145) District School Board of Alachua County for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2002.

Conclusion and Recommendations ———

Summary of Conclusions for Management Structures Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
Board and Superintendent Roles and Responsibilities	1. The roles and responsibilities of the board and superintendent have been clearly delineated, and board members and the superintendent have policies to ensure that they have effective working relationships.	Yes	2-7
	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.	No	2-10
	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	2-11
Organization, Staffing and Resource Allocation	5. The district's organizational structure has clearly defined units and lines of authority that minimize administrative costs.	Yes	2-12
	6. The district periodically reviews its administrative staffing and makes changes to eliminate unnecessary positions and improve operating efficiency.	Yes	2-14
	7. The superintendent and school board exercise effective oversight of the district's financial resources.	Yes	2-15
	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.	Yes	2-17
Planning and Budgeting	9. The district has a multi-year strategic plan with annual goals and measurable objectives based on identified needs, projected enrollment, and revenues.	Yes	2-18
	10. The district has a system to accurately project enrollment.	Yes	2-19
	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.	Yes	2-20
	12. When necessary, the district considers options to increase revenue.	Yes	2-21
Community Involvement	13. The district actively involves parents and guardians in the district's decision-making and activities.	Yes	2-22
	14. The district actively involves business partners and community organizations in the district's decision making and activities.	Yes	2-23

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 Alachua County School District is using this best practice. The school board membership changed during the course of this review when, two months after the start of this evaluation, the district elected three new board members. As a result, some of the information collected reflects interview information obtained from the board that existed prior to Autumn 2002, while follow-up surveys gathered the views of members of the new board. We recognize that new board members have been in office for only a few months, are still learning their role, and have not yet qualified as a master board.

The Alachua County School District has written policies that clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of the board and the appointed superintendent, and evidence indicates that policies are followed and comply with state statutes. The school board formulates policy, and the superintendent carries these policies out in the daily operations of the district. All members receive training by the Florida School Board Association (FSBA), which includes the roles and responsibilities of the board and superintendent and Sunshine Law requirements. The new board is being trained to re-qualify as a master board, and should be certified by December 2003.

Current board members and the superintendent inform each other of controversial issues that may arise during board meetings. According to the superintendent, the cooperative atmosphere being developed with the board discourages the appearance of "surprises matters" presented by board members during meetings, although no controversial issues have yet surfaced with this board. The superintendent expressed that in the past, controversial matters were generally handled through direct telephone contact with board members.

Although the district is using this best practice, there are three areas in which the district could improve interactions among the board, the superintendent, and district staff. First, current board members stated that, while the superintendent and staff respond to their inquiries and two board members send questions directly to staff. While the district has asked board members to copy the superintendent on these requests,

this expectation should be part of a written policy so that the superintendent is notified of all board members' information requests, so she can ensure that staff time is optimally used, that efforts are not duplicated, and that the risk of micromanagement is minimized.

> **We recommend that the district develop a procedure to share all board information requests with the superintendent, for example, by emailing requests with a copy to the superintendent. Action Plan 2-1 describes the steps necessary to implement this recommendation.**

Second, while school board members are pleased with the superintendent's performance, and her handling of the district's economic condition, the superintendent's evaluation does not include measurable performance objectives or annual goals. Instead, the evaluation relies on "meets expectations; does not meet expectations; exceeds expectations" for major areas such as academic/vocational, management, community involvement, and learning environment. As of June 2003, the super indent's evaluation was being amended to include measurable goals and objectives. Additionally, the board does not evaluate its own performance. The board should revise the superintendent's evaluation to include measurable performance objectives and should establish an annual self-evaluation that is coordinated with the review and update of the strategic plan. In this way, the board can accurately assess its efforts and leadership to ensure that the district's strategies are prioritized and funded.

> **We recommend that the district adopt a revised superintendent's annual evaluation that includes measurable performance goals and objectives, and that the board should evaluate its own performance, linked to achievement of strategic plan goals and objectives.**

Third, several responses to the evaluation team's survey of April 2003 indicate there is room for the superintendent, staff, and the board to improve the perception that some stakeholders have of district leadership. Only 28% of teachers agreed that the district's top-level administration leads with a solid vision of quality education. Additionally, only 51% of school principals agreed that the school board and the superintendent effectively work together with common goals, and only 33% agreed that the school board is decisive and prompt when addressing significant policy issues.

> **We recommend that the board and the superintendent improve efforts to communicate the district's vision, goals, and objectives by increasing board member and employee participation in the strategic planning process. This will ensure the district develops a common vision for its educational and operational goals. Action Plan 2-1 presents the steps necessary to implement this recommendation.**

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 on the majority of policy issues presented during a particular meeting. To use this best practice the school board and superintendent should employ formal and informal mechanisms that ensure board meetings run efficiently and effectively, and 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 frequently ask staff for more information or clarifications on agenda items and provided materials. More importantly, regardless of how well board meetings are run, board members and the superintendent should ensure that meetings

are accessible and open to the public at large. For example, meetings should be located in large population concentrations at times that are not in conflict with the work hours of the majority of the public (e.g., board meetings should usually begin after 6:00 p.m.). If possible, board meetings should be broadcast live, or taped for later broadcast, on local public access television channels.

The Alachua County School District prepares a master calendar showing the dates of major events, and the calendar is substantially followed during the school year with only minor alterations or postponements. School board meetings are readily accessible to the public and time is allocated for public input. A reasonable number of items are pulled from the consent agenda for additional discussion, ensuring that special issues are properly explored but that routine items are dispatched effectively. Interviews with the board and board attorney show that agenda materials are received in ample time for members to review before board meetings take place.

During the course of this review, the district improved management of its board meetings. Prior to March 2003, board meetings often ran late into the night, lasting up to six hours. Public input, with no time limits, was placed at the beginning of the agenda and while Roberts Rule of Order was technically used, the school board did not adhere to all practices and therefore did not have full control of meetings. For example, when the members discussed an issue, audience members would shout responses or comments, and some school board members would recognize the commentator, even though he or she was out of order. Staff has made great efforts to streamline the school board meeting process. As of March 2003, the district began to improve meeting management by limiting public comment to three minutes for each individual to speak to agenda items and by adhering to Roberts Rule of Order. The board chair also reads a prepared statement at the beginning of the meeting noting that comments or outbursts from the audience will not be tolerated.

Although, the district is using this best practice, several adjustments can improve board meetings. First, while the district restructured and significantly improved the agenda in March 2003 to provide board members the information necessary to evaluate each issue, the district should ensure that other important elements are included in the executive summary of each major item. Currently, the executive summaries include: the item description, purpose, explanation, staff recommendation, links to the strategic plan, and budgetary and fiscal impacts. However, the summaries do not specifically include elements relating to school board policies (what policy or law may apply to the item; whether the item complies with, duplicates, modifies, or affects existing policies or procedures; whether a new policy is needed to implement the proposed action).

> **We recommend that the executive summary of each agenda item specifically include elements that relate to school board policies. The staff attorney should be responsible for listed affected policies for every agenda item.**

Second, while district administration attempts to resolve parent and public concerns, three of five board members expressed that concern that parents and the public do not have proper channels to resolve grievances administratively before coming to the board. As a result, many items included in the board meeting agenda should have been resolved administratively and should not require board meeting time and attention. Normally, parent, student or staff grievances go directly to the school principals who attempt to resolve the issue. If that fails, the next step is to resolve the concern administratively by going to an assistant superintendent or the superintendent. However, the district does not consistently evaluate the responsiveness of principals to parent complaints and their ability to resolve complaints at the school level. Each year, the administration reviews of the principals' appraisal system, and this year included principal efforts to resolve parent and other constituent complaints as part of the evaluation.

> We recommend that the district ensure that the revised principal performance appraisal system ensures that management practices are effectively monitored, including efforts to resolve parent and other constituent complaints. See Action Plan 2-3 for the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Best Practice 3: Not Using

While the board and superintendent have established written policies that are updated by legal counsel as needed, in the areas of procedures, the district has been less thorough.

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

The Alachua County School District has a written policy manual that is available on the district's web site. These policies are readily understandable, cover pertinent areas, and are consistent with the *Florida Statutes*. They are updated and/or revised when changes are recommended. The board attorney attends most board meetings and advises on pertinent issues that may be affected by school board policies. The policy revision process includes review, discussion, draft, public hearings, and board review with a vote to accept or decline the revision. The superintendent has assigned the newly hired (April 2003) in-house attorney the responsibility to regularly update policies to reflect changes in law and ensure relevancy. Any recommended changes will be presented to the board and board attorney for further change or final approval. District policies do not address procedural matters, which are addressed through administrative manuals or directives from the superintendent.

However, the district is not using this best practice, because it does not have a comprehensive manual that includes up-to-date procedures for all areas. The superintendent utilizes memorandums for some procedures such as summer work hours and political activities at school sites. In addition, the maintenance, technology, personnel, educational services, and several cost controls functions lack operating procedures manuals, thus adding to potential confusion and an inability to determine departmental compliance with district policies and procedures as well as pertinent state and federal laws.

Action Plan 2-1

We recommend that the district develop a comprehensive procedures manual.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Department heads should first develop and/or update operating manuals for their respective areas, cross-referencing the procedures to the originating board policy.
	Step 2.	Once department procedures are developed, a district-wide manual for procedures that cross department lines should be developed.
	Step 3.	District level procedures should be developed where appropriate, including a procedure share all board information requests with the superintendent as discussed in BP1 and the other procedures currently contained in memos, notices, and other less official documents.
	Step 4.	The district should facilitate public consultation of the administrative guidelines by establishing a direct link to the procedure manual through the home page of the website (Intranet) as with school board policies.
	Step 5.	The district should consider footnoting each policy stating where the procedures for that particular policy are located. As long as individuals can access procedures through the computer, updates can be made without having to distribute hard copies throughout the district.
Who Is Responsible	Superintendent, department heads.	
Time Frame	August 2004	

Best Practice 4: Using

The district obtains legal services to advise it about policy and reduce the risk of lawsuits and its legal costs have been reasonable.

To use this best practice, school boards should have appropriate, responsive legal counsel. Legal services should be comprehensive, providing input on district policies, personnel issues, and advice to ensure that the district complies with federal and state legal requirements. Legal services should support the board, its individual members, the superintendent and district staff. In smaller districts, legal services are more likely to be contracted out, while the largest districts may have several in-house attorneys as well as contracted attorneys. As small districts grow in size, they should periodically evaluate whether hiring a full-time in-house attorney would be more cost-effective for the districts. Regardless of the district's size, legal expenses (including hourly rates, retainer fees, and total annual expenditures) should be evaluated for accuracy and appropriateness.

The Alachua County School District has a contracted board attorney and staff attorney position, recently refilled, with significant changes to the position's responsibilities. (April 2003). The board attorney attends school board meetings and advises on policy, areas at-risk for lawsuits, real estate dealings, review of contracts, and review of board agendas and materials prior to meetings. Board members and district administrators can directly contact the board attorney with questions. This practice, if abused, can result in uncontrolled expenses. However, in a smaller district like Alachua with no past concerns that the attorney's time has been misused, formal procedures may not be necessary, as long as costs are monitored, as described below.

The staff attorney represents the superintendent and staff and responsibilities include interpretation of statutes, charters, ordinances, contracts, and federal and state regulations. Among other duties, this office also prepares and renders legal opinions for the superintendent and staff upon request, prepares and conducts litigation and administrative law hearings, provides assistance in drafting legal documents, negotiates between parties, prepares pleadings and trial/appellate briefs, and advises the superintendent in all staff contract negotiations. As part of the recent large restructuring effort, the administration has expanded the responsibilities of the staff attorney to include responsibility for the Personnel Services and Risk Management functions. This use of an in-house attorney is unique and reflects the district's need to

strengthen its human resources function (refer to Chapter 6, Personnel Systems and Benefits). Specifically, the district hopes that by combining employee prevention and intervention activities into one unit, it will improve prevention efforts and result in overall improvements in efficiency and effectiveness.

Most school districts with a full-time staff attorney in addition to the board attorney are considerably larger than Alachua. Peers districts have one board attorney as stipulated by law, but only Alachua has both a staff attorney and contracted board attorney. Compared to its peers, with a range of $118-$175 per hour for board attorney fees, Alachua's board attorney fee of $155 is reasonable. In addition to these comparable costs, the district also funds the salary and benefits package of the new in-house attorney, for both legal and the other duties, at approximately $109,000 per year.

While the district is using this best practice, it could improve its operations by regularly reviewing its legal costs. First, the district should monitor all attorney costs and periodically asses whether it should continue the salaried (staff attorney) and contracted (board attorney) options or if it would be more effective to obtain these services in another way. In addition, when retaining additional counsel to manage specialty areas or conflicts of interest, purchasing these services should clearly consider cost as well as professional recommendation.

> **We recommend that the district systematically evaluate all salaried and contracted legal services and expenses, including the effectiveness of the personnel and risk management oversight role of its staff attorney.**

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.

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

The Alachua County School District has organizational charts reflecting the structure adopted in July 2003, including the broad organizational structure and detailed charts for the deputy superintendent reporting units. The district regularly reviews its business practices and organizational structure with a consultant. Results are reported to the board and the district utilizes the results of these reviews to make changes to the organizational structure and streamline operations to improve operating efficiency.

In response the several financial challenges in school year 2001-02, the district developed a Budget Stabilization and Cost Containment Plan. This plan involved budget cuts, which included staff reductions. Of the 37 eliminated administrative and professional positions, 7 were administrative and included the following:

1. Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Administration

2. Supervisor I Curriculum

3. Computer Operations Manager

4. District Services Manager

5. Construction Services Manager

6. Director I, Human Resources Development

7. Supervisor, Vocational Education

During the course of this review, the district restructured it major organization to streamline administrative staff and improve the distribution of duties and responsibilities. The proposed changes were presented and approved by the board in May 2003 and were effective July 2003. The newest changes eliminated 12 administrative positions and 11 support and professional/technical positions and reclassified 12 administrative positions to flatten the organizational structure and gain efficiencies. The eliminated administrative positions included:

- Deputy Superintendent for Student Services
- Executive Director, Curriculum Service
- Executive Director, PreK-Adult Programs
- Director, Auditing and Accountability
- Director, Facilities
- Director, Technology and Curriculum Training

- Manager, Printing
- Coordinator, Communications
- Coordinator, Personnel
- Coordinator, Personnel Contract Maintenance
- Chief Accountant, Payroll
- Senior Accountant

With these changes, the district estimates a cost savings of approximately $1.1 million per year. Exhibit 2-2 depicts the organizational structure as of July 2003. Management's goal for this reorganization was to minimize staff while simultaneously filling critical positions to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of each department and the district overall.

One area of concern was the need to balance the span of control of the three deputy superintendents. The deputy superintendent for Planning, Budgeting, and Systems Accountability directly supervised six individuals and was responsible for 20+ functions, while the deputy superintendent for Student and Community Services and the deputy superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction supervised five and two individuals respectively. The recent reorganization eliminated the deputy superintendent for Student and Community Services position and distributed those functions among other high level executives, resulting in more balanced spans of control. In addition, the district opted to outsource the internal auditing function, saving nearly $20,000 annually.

In contrast, the district's budget proposes filling two critical positions that have been vacant for the past two years. These include the planning and budgeting officer and the public relations specialist. The planning and budget officer position function has been carried out cooperatively by the superintendent, the deputy superintendent of Planning, Budgeting, and Systems Accountability, and the CFO. This position will now be filled by the former director of Facilities, whose position was eliminated. In addition, the public relations function has been divided among several individuals, limiting the district's

ability to ensure thorough and timely public information, the assistant to the superintendent for Community and School Relations position, which supports the superintendent in those capacities. We encourage the superintendent and the board to follow through with plans to fill the public relations position.

While the district has revised its organizational structure to meet operational and fiscal objectives, the responsibilities of each organizational unit have not been clearly defined and the new organizational chart has not been communicated to all employees or the public. This could be confusing especially since the district has reorganized several times over the past three years. The district does not have a comprehensive document listing the responsibilities or duties of and within each department other than though job descriptions. In February 2003 the district began to update the responsibilities and duties for each job and to refine the organizational chart.

> **We recommend that the district continue its efforts to define the duties of each job, especially the director positions and communicate these responsibilities throughout the district. Additionally, the district should continually update the organizational charts and complete recent efforts to place this information in the district's website.**

Best Practice 6: Using

The district periodically reviews its administrative staffing and makes changes to eliminate unnecessary positions and improve operating efficiency.

To use this best practice, school districts' 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 Alachua County School District periodically reviews its administrative staffing levels to improve its operating efficiency and presents a written report to the board. Five reviews were performed by outside organizations in the past seven years, including one for cost efficiency which included a staffing level review and a staffing analysis. As a result of these studies, the district has implemented a series of changes.

Because of the ongoing financial constraints, recent changes to the organizational structure have been budget driven and focused on improving operating efficiency. As described in Best Practice 5 of this chapter, the district eliminated or reassigned 67.5 administrative, professional and instructional positions in April 2002, as part of its Budget Stabilization and Cost Containment Plan. In April 2003 the district eliminated or reclassified an additional 36 administrative and support professional/technical positions.

Based on the information available through the Department of Education using district reported data, the administrative staffing level in Alachua is reasonable given the number of students served and services provided.[1] While direct comparisons across peer districts are difficult because each district may categorize administrative positions differently, the evaluation team conducted two analyses using available data and concluded the following:

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[1] The Florida Department of Education groups employees into three categories, administrative, instructional, and support. Broad state guidelines exist to assist districts in accurately classifying staff into these categories. However, as general guidelines, they are subject to local interpretation, which has resulted in inconsistent reporting across districts, making comparisons difficult.

- Analysis of DOE Profiles of Florida School Districts data for 2000-01 and 2001-02 shows that the district's full time instructional and administrative staff as a percentage of total staff is comparable to peers and the state average except for professional support staff. In this category, the peer range for professional support staff ranges from 1.73% to 3.76% of total staff with the state average at 2.73% for year 2001-02. Alachua, with 4.4% of its staff in this category is above its peers and the state for year 2001-02. Similar results were obtained for year 2000-01

- Based on Staff In Florida's Public Schools, Fall 2002 data, the district is within peer district range in six selected administrative categories: officials, administrators, and managers; consultants and supervisors of instruction; principals; assistant principals; community education coordinators; and, deans/curriculum coordinators.

Although the district is using this best practice, two actions would improve its operations. First, aside from the 1996 cost efficiency study, which sought teacher, administration, and board input, the district did not obtain stakeholder input during subsequent reviews. The evaluation team's principal survey supports this, since only 58% of school principals agreed or strongly agreed that the district obtains broad stakeholder input in conducting its administrative staffing reviews. To ensure that new administrative structures address the district's changing operational needs and that all district staff understands the purpose and effects of any proposed reorganization, stakeholder input should be obtained.

> **We recommend that the district secure stakeholder input during future review processes.**

Additionally, the district should conduct in-depth analyses to assess whether the number of professional support staff can be reduced to comparable peer and state levels, or whether other supports such as aids, or duty reassignments such as responsibility for several school campuses, could be used to further reduce the district's annual operating costs without compromising key service needs.

> **We recommend that the district assess the professional support staff category to justify these staffing levels or reduce the number of positions as needed.**

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

The Alachua County School District's budget and financial management practices on a number of dimensions are strong. The proposed budget is presented to the board in an easy-to-read, understandable, and concise format and the district has a structured timetable for the budget process that includes the board in all the stages. The district keeps the board up-to-date through periodic budget workshops, executive agenda summaries, monthly budget amendments and updates at each board meeting. District

staff compiles budget proposals by major function and over the prior two fiscal years and presents this information to the board. The board also has procedures to manage budget reductions and, when necessary, implements these procedures. Additionally, board policy on purchasing and bidding establishes limits on how much district staff can spend without approval, with the board reviewing and approving all purchases that exceed these amounts.

The district recently changed its agenda format, expanding the amount of budget related information available to board members to guide decision-making. The district is also considering increasing the number of board workshops. Four of the five current board members expressed they receive training in district financial practices and that training met their needs.

While the district is using this best practice, the financial information provided to the school board could be improved. While our review of the recently revised agenda format suggests information is presented clearly and the budget is generally presented in an easy to read and understandable manner, two current board members do not agree and one is neutral. While these responses may reflect the steep learning curve for all board members especially in the area of school finance, the district should ensure its budget information meets board member's needs. In addition, in response to the statement: *"The board is informed of the short and long-term fiscal implications of proposed budgets or budget amendments"* 40% of the current school board members disagreed and 20% were neutral. This suggests the district can improve the information given to board members on the extended fiscal impact of current proposed budget changes, to ensure that board members have the ability to fully analyze presented information and make well-informed decisions.

> **We recommend that the administration work with board members to adjust and clarify the budget portion of the agenda, and highlight the short and long-term fiscal implications of proposed budgets or amendments to support board members' decision- making.**

Significant declines in the district's financial condition are reported to the board in a timely manner, and the board takes necessary corrective action. For example, during the 2001-02 state-wide budget crises, the district surveyed school staff and administrators and compiled the information to offer the school board suggestions on implementing over $10 million in budget cuts. While the administration and board proactively addressed the unanticipated budget cuts, other non-negotiable commitments limited the district's flexibility. As a result, the district was forced to use long-term capital outlay monies to fund recurring maintenance expenses and internal services. These events combined to push the district's unreserved fund balance to dangerously low levels (Exhibit 2-8), placing the district at great financial risk. The district is taking steps to improve its fiscal health, such as the reorganization described earlier, and expects to improve the fund balance to $1.5 million or 3 to 4% of the recurring expenditures by the end of the 2003-04 school year. The district could strengthen its commitment to fiscal soundness by amending its strategic plan to include a provision to maintain an unreserved fund balance between 3-4% of operating expenses. This will ensure that planning efforts adequately include future fund balance needs. Action Plan 11-3, Cost Control chapter 11, provides the steps necessary to implement this recommendation.

Exhibit 2-8
By 2001 Alachua's Average Unreserved Fund Balance as a Percentage of the Expenditures is Significantly Below Its Peer Districts and Recommended Standards [1]

Year	Alachua	Bay	Collier	Lake	Marion	St. Lucie
1999-00	1.9%	5.05%	2.49%	NA	4.31%	1.57%
2000-01	0.4%	2.90%	2.77%	NA	5.81%	1.40%
2001-02	0.02%	3.70%	2.07%	6.15%	5.27%	1.70%

[1] Bay and St. Lucie receive additional revenues from a ½ cent school capital outlay tax, and Lake receives 1/3 cent from its school capital outlay tax.

Source: Auditor General and peer districts, financial and operational information for the fiscal years ended June 30, 2000, 2001, and 2002, and ValienteHernandez P.A. calculations, 2003.

Best Practice 8: Using

The district has assigned school principals the authority they need to effectively manage their schools.

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

The Alachua County School District communicates the authority it has assigned to school principals through several job descriptions, a performance appraisal system, and the Preparing New Principals program. Job descriptions for elementary, middle, and high schools principals detail the responsibilities and authority of those positions. The performance appraisal system includes requirements to follow district policies and details essential performance functions. Individuals wishing to become principals are required to participate in the Preparing New Principals Program, which offers a clear picture of expectations and span of authority across six performance areas. School principals who responded to the April 2003 survey conducted by the evaluation team are satisfied with their level of authority and interactions with the administration.

The district gives school principals staffing and budget flexibility to help them achieve school, district, and state education goals, allowing some discretionary spending beyond mandatory allocations. Each school is supplied a total unit or staff allocation and an expenditure budget, and each school prepares a staffing budget which is submitted to the district for approval. School level staffing is based on "staffing units" which are predetermined ratios based on the unweighted student FTE's for each school. School principals can allocate their budget within the staffing unit configurations assigned to their school. Principals are allowed to adjust units among the different personnel categories, allowing them to reallocate staff to meet school needs. Sixty-one percent of principals responding to our survey expressed that staffing and budgeting flexibility is adequate and 30% were neutral.

The district uses internal audit reviews to ensure principals adhere to policies and procedures, including separate audits of internal accounts, cafeteria operations, FTE, and textbook inventory. In addition

principals' evaluations monitor compliance but as mentioned in Chapter 6, Personnel, this evaluation system needs to be revised and adjusted.

While the district is using this best practice, additional measures would strengthen its oversight of school-based administration. First, the district does not regularly assess school-based authority. Although there are no indications that school administrators abuse or shun their authority, lack of regular assessment of management practices placed the district at risk for not becoming aware of problems in a timely manner. As part of this assessment, the district will he the information needed to enhance school-based decision-making, and ensure that school administrators adhere to district policies and procedures.

> **We recommend that the district regularly assess the authority assigned to school-based administrators and use this information as an opportunity to enhance school-based decision making practices and to ensure adherence to district policies and procedures.**

PLANNING AND BUDGETING

Best Practice 9: Using

The district has a multi-year strategic plan with annual goals based on identified needs, projected enrollment, and revenues, which can be further improved by modifying the plan's objectives to be measurable.

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

The Alachua County School District has a multi-year strategic plan that addresses state and district education goals, including student performance goals. A summary of the plan's mission statement, parameters, beliefs and goals is found in background section of Chapter 3, Performance Accountability. The plan spans years 2000 to 2004, is board approved, and designed to support the district's mission, parameters, objectives and beliefs. While the strategic plan has not been updated since its inception, priorities are updated annually. On a quarterly basis, district administrators and the school board assess the progress the district has made toward achieving its objectives. At the end of the year the district produces a detailed report that explains the progress in achieving the overall strategic plan goals.

At the beginning of the school year and during the budget process, the district executive team assists the superintendent in identifying and recommending a set of priorities based on the annual assessment of the action plans. Then, the board identifies and formally adopts a limited number of district priorities to guide the district's strategies and major financial and program decisions. These priorities drive the budget for the school year and the board instructs district staff on how these priorities should be considered in making program and budget decisions. All budget requests submitted by program directors must reference a strategic plan strategy and action plan number before approval is granted. A review of the annual strategic plan indicated the district met its annual priorities for the last two school years.

On July 2002, the second year of strategic plan implementation, the district updated its plan. The 2002-03 strategic plan update has 3 objectives, 6 parameters, 15 beliefs, 9 strategies and 99 action plans. Each strategy (goal) contains action plans (objectives), and the strategy is linked to the annual budget. Refer to Chapter 3, Performance Accountability, for in-depth discussion of district and program goals and objectives.

Some of the programs addressed in the district's strategic plan include: career and technical education, curriculum and instructional services, exceptional student education, facilities, food service, personnel services, and instructional technology. There are several strategies included for each program.

While the district is using this best practice, it can improve by amending the plan to ensure that all objectives and goals are measurable. While each strategy has an expected result, and the district details its annual accomplishments by listing the activities that took place, the goals and objectives are not measurable and thus, the district can not objectively measure accomplishment, progress or partial achievement at any point in time. The lack of measurability also limits the board's and the public's ability to use information to assess the program performance. As described in Action Plan 3-1, Performance Accountability, the district's strategic plan should be updated and revised to include measurable goals and objectives for evaluation, and performance measures should be revised and include appropriate benchmarks from comparable school districts, government agencies, and private industry.

> **We recommend that the district amend its strategic plan to ensure that all goals and objectives are measurable.**

Best Practice 10: Using

The district has a system to accurately project enrollment.

To use this best practice, school districts must have a system to provide the most accurate student enrollment projections possible. Full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment projections are used for many purposes in districts including budgeting and funding, zoning, estimates of facility requirements and staffing ratios. Because of the critical nature of FTE projections, districts must have trained staff and formal procedures for applying both the state projection methodologies and local corrective methodologies. At a minimum, the district must use the cohort survival methodology provided by the Florida Department of Education 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 Alachua County School District accurately forecasts enrollment, with the margin of error over the last four years less than 1%. The district uses the DOE cohort survival methodology. Analysis is completed on the DOE web-based system using the prior year's model that offered the most accurate projection as the method to develop the following year's projection. The primary factor for predicting enrollment in the county is the fluctuation in the number of women of childbearing age.

Overall, Alachua's student enrollment is declining, a trend that is expected to continue. Elementary schools show a decline in enrollment even though high school enrollment is still increasing. In the 1998-99 school year, there was a decline of 1.3% and decline has continued in subsequent years. Charter school and home schooling further reduce the number of students in public schools. The methodology the district uses for enrollment projections considers these factors. When making enrollment forecasts, the district also considers additional factors such as planned enrollment changes in private schools, influences

due to changes in employment opportunities, city/county comprehensive plans, and planned new development in the district. The DOE methods utilized in making projections provides an opportunity to make adjustments for additional factors.

The district participates in the state mandated audit with very few findings. The last "Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP)—Full-Time Equivalents (FTE) Students and Student Transportation" report stated that the district complied with the requirements of FEFP regarding the determination and reporting of FTE students and students transported for the fiscal year ended June 2002.

As the critical issue of FTE reporting, the district continually checks source data. An information support specialist in the MIS Department coordinates these scheduled reports throughout the year to notify schools of possible problems. In addition, the MIS Department's district data base coordinator visits schools that might be experiencing difficulty in data management. Principals are also expected to ensure FTE accuracy, with sign-off on the accuracy of student attendance, teacher master schedules, and student FTE schedules.

While the district is using this best practice, improvements can be made in one area. The district does not use the enrollment projections in conjunction with self-generated information concerning shifting population demographics. Documentation shows that the district has relied on schools' input to adjust individual school projections. While individual school input is important, it is uncertain whether information is consistently supplied, as all schools may not have the same analysis tools and/or same level of access to information

> **We recommend that the district monitor shifting population demographics and incorporate information into the enrollment forecasting process. An assessment of housing starts could provide needed data.**

Best Practice 11: Using

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.

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

The Alachua County School District links its financial reporting, plans, and budgets to the overall strategic plan. District administrators are aware of the strategic plan and direct efforts toward achieving the priority goals. In addition, other economic pressures, including state budget reductions combined with union negotiated raises, has necessitated the use of reserves and maintenance funds for recurring expenditures. Strategic plan goals are broad and objectives can not be measured, but the district is addressing this as a part of its current overall restructuring and reevaluating in light of the current economic conditions.

Many budget and expenditure items are attributed to student learning, a term that appears to function as a catch-all category. Still, student achievement in reading remains a priority, leading the district to adopt a new reading series and provide teachers with training and new materials to effectively use this new resource. Strengthening the strategic plan with measurable goals and objectives (see Best Practice 9 of

this chapter) will increase the usefulness of the strategic plan, improve district efforts to link its budget to district priorities and will also assist district administrators better direct resources to achieving the goals and objectives in a more effective manner.

Best Practice 12: Using

When necessary, the district considers options to increase revenue.

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

The Alachua County School District's total revenues per FTE compare favorably with its peers. It receives slightly more state funds and relies less on local funding, which is expected given the amount of county property that is tax exempt. The district has also considered several local options to increase revenue and has maximized non-voted local revenue sources to the extent the law allows. Each year the district levies the maximum discretionary and supplemental millage for general operating expenses such as salaries, teaching supplies, equipment and utilities. The district also levies the full two mills of non-voted discretionary capital. The district has also reached its maximum millage for educational funding. Currently, the district has three State School Bond obligation issues, three District General Obligation Bond Issues, and four COPS outstanding.

The district's grants department, comprised of one director and four staff, is the primary source for locating new funding sources. Revenues from the district's grant writing efforts have consistently increased. Efforts focus on opportunities that meet the greatest needs and have highest chance for success. The grant department's efforts along with Alachua County Public School Foundation, Inc., and other fundraising efforts generates significant income for the district, totaling nearly $28 million or $13% of the district's total governmental fund revenues for fiscal year 2001-02.

As previously noted, the district is limited in its ability to raise revenues via property taxes because most of the county's property is owned by the state, and it is currently taxed at the maximum allowable amount. Debt service for COPS issues requires a large portion of the Capital Outlay millage; consequently, items that previously were purchased with capital funds must now be purchased from the operating budget.

Notably, the district's declining student enrollment also impacts its economies of scale as it decreases district revenues. While expenditures for direct student contacts (teachers) are reduced, other operating expenses, including transportation, food services, personnel support, general administration, etc. are not proportionately reduced until enrollment reductions are significant. This means districts with declining enrollments face unique pressures on their budgets to continue operations with less revenue. Added pressures to reduce class sizes and increase teacher salaries further exacerbate the fiscal stress. In addition, as described in the background section, general fund expenditures have recently been higher than district revenues, resulting in an extremely low unreserved general fund balance, which must be replenished. Finally, the district has deferred long term needs in response to recent budget shortfalls; including preventive maintenance efforts (Chapter 8, Facilities Maintenance Best Practice 14) and difficulties ensuring up-to date technology (Chapter 5, Administrative and Instructional Technology, Best Practice 2). The district cannot continue to operate under these conditions and maintain financial health

while meeting these pressures longer than one or two years. As the district has assessed all the available non-voted options, the district has few options for additional revenues.

For limited funding, that directly supports student efforts, the district can pursue Medicaid reimbursement for direct services to eligible students (See Chapter 4, Educational Service Delivery, Best Practice 2 for details.). For infrastructure needs, including maintenance and technology, the district can consider two options. One option is to pursue an infrastructure sales tax in partnership with the county and municipalities. Revenues are allocated among the participating entities and can be used to support infrastructure needs including maintenance and technology. In addition, the district can independently pursue a one half-cent sales tax option. The district could receive as much as 13.2 million each year or $71.75 million over five-years for capital outlay projects. Decisions to pursue optional revenue increases should be balanced against efforts to increase efficiency. There are several recommendations within this report that can assist the district in assessing that balance.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Best Practice 13: Using

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

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

The Alachua County School District attempts to engage parents and guardians in the activities of both the district and the individual schools. Through school newsletters, flyers, and a district web site, parents and guardians are informed of school, staff, and student activities, progress, and plans. The monthly school board meeting is open to the public and held in the evening when most parents can attend. Parents can also nominate themselves or others to serve on the School Advisory Councils (SAC) based at each school. Parents on SACs are actively involved in making decisions regarding school improvement. All SAC members must attend training to prepare for this leadership and decision-making role, with the district offering over 20 opportunities each year on topics such as state laws, district policies pertaining to SAC, developing school improvement plans, parenting, and helping children succeed on the FCAT

Active Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and/or Parent Teacher Student Association groups exist at most schools. All schools, except five, have PTAs and those exceptions rely on other groups such as SACs or *Academic Boosters* to meet these same needs. Parents are encouraged to volunteer at school events and to mentor both in and out of the classroom. District administration relies on principals to inform them of concerns or needed actions raised by PTAs or PTSAs. A representative from the Alachua County Council of PTAs (ACCPTA) is on the Superintendent's Advisory Council that meets once each month, and through this contact information is shared with the superintendent.

While the district is using this best practice, greater parent involvement in the decision-making activities is needed. Communications primarily tell parents about school activities and opportunities but do not offer much opportunity for parental input. While 87% of the teachers surveyed in April 2003 believe

their school's efforts to communicate with parents are effective. As of June 2003, the district was taking steps to improve parent involvement in their child's education. The district has enhanced its website, published flyers, is increasing home visits for at-risk students and for parents who are unable to go to the schools, and will offer more opportunities for parent-teacher conferences.

Second, several responses to the ValienteHernandez P.A. survey indicate there is room for the superintendent, staff, and the board to improve efforts to communicate its objectives to stakeholders. Four of the five board members expressed that the district is ineffective at communicating its objectives to stakeholders. The vacant public information specialist position has likely contributed to this condition

> **We recommend that the district use the public relations specialist position, once filled, to proactively share district priorities and objectives with the community as well as respond to requests for information.**

Best Practice 14: Using

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

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

The Alachua County School District regularly communicates with local business entities. The "Business Partner News" and "Partners In Education" are publications for both school personnel and business associates. The district distributes an annual survey to update business partners' information, obtain the business community's input on current and emerging issues, and to assess business' past and future participation. A "Partners in Education" breakfast is held annually to acknowledge business partners. Businesses also contribute through the local non-profit foundation, which will generate approximately $250,000-300,000 for student scholarships, staff development scholarships, and school grants, for the 2002-03 school year. The foundation, the grants staff, and the volunteer department maintain steady contact with current and potential business partners. Finally, the School Advisory Councils (SACs), which include representatives from business and community groups, ensure that the business and civic community is involved in improving each school's performance.

3 Performance Accountability Systems

Summary

The Alachua County School District is using one of the three performance accountability best practices. The district reports on the performance of its basic educational programs. To use the remaining best practice standards and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its performance accountability system, the district needs to ensure that all goals in its strategic plan are measurable, conduct evaluations based on need, and use these evaluations to modify programs.

Background

The Alachua County School District has three main documents that can serve as foundation for the district's performance accountability system:

- District Strategic Plan,

- School Improvement Plans (SIPs), and

- Comprehensive Curriculum Plan (CCP).

In July 2002, the district adopted an updated strategic plan which outlines the district's mission, values or beliefs, the parameters guiding its decisions, objectives for student performance, and its broad strategies for achieving those objectives. (See Exhibit 3-1).

Exhibit 3-1
The Alachua County School District Strategic Plan
Contains a Mission Statement, Parameters, Beliefs, and Strategies

Mission Statement	Objectives
The mission of the Alachua County school district, the vital force in the heart of northern Florida, is to guarantee each student will excel in every chosen arena through an education system characterized by compassion and integrity, an engaging curriculum tailored to meet individual needs and aspirations, application of innovative approaches, and the courage to continuously form and reform to meet every new challenge	**Each student will:** ▪ succeed at his or her next chosen pursuit. ▪ discover and realize his or her unique talents. ▪ be a model citizen.

Parameters	
▪ We will make all decisions based strictly on the best interest of the student. ▪ We will not compromise excellence. ▪ We will not do anything that does not effectively support our elementary-secondary instructional program. ▪ We will always guarantee equal opportunity for all learners. ▪ We will ensure the optimal use of technology throughout the educational system. ▪ We will honor our cultural diversity in every aspect of our educational community.	

Beliefs	Strategies
We believe that: ▪ Each person has an unlimited capacity for learning. ▪ All persons have a right to equal opportunity for success. ▪ Each person has intrinsic value. ▪ High expectations lead to greater achievement. ▪ Every person has the right to be safe. ▪ The family is the most important group to which any person belongs. ▪ Everyone is responsible for his/her actions. ▪ Honesty and integrity are essential to relationships. ▪ Groups prosper best when the needs of their members are met. ▪ Cultural diversity enriches our lives. ▪ Traditions define community. ▪ Perception can be an unreliable source of truth. ▪ Education is the top priority for any society. ▪ Public education is vital to the common good. ▪ Service to others is a moral imperative.	1. We will ensure conditions which provide optimal learning for every student. 2. We will develop innovative and relevant curricula which engage and are tailored to each student's needs and aspirations. 3. We will create a collaborative system among our communities to educate all students. 4. We will ensure the effectiveness of all staff. 5. We will involve all our families in the educational process. 6. We will acquire and allocate resources to guarantee equal opportunity for all students. 7. We will ensure that each student is prepared to learn every day. 8. We will transform teaching and learning in order to accomplish our mission. 9. We will develop organizational capacity capable of continuous transformation.

Source: School Board of Alachua County, "Strategic Planning Update for Alachua County Schools, 2001-02 School Year", July 2, 2002

For each strategy, the plan contains a number of more detailed action plans. These action plans vary in specificity. For example, the first action plan for strategy 1 is to provide high quality transportation services and the eleventh is to establish diversity training. Each year, the district summarizes the progress it has made in implementing the action plans as it updates the strategic plan. The board then selects the action plans it will establish as priorities during the next school year and ties these priorities to its budget. In addition, each department within the district describes the actions it will take in support of the district's strategies.

School Improvement Plans are an essential part of the district's accountability system. Goals are aligned with the state's educational goals for K-12:

1. Graduation Rate/Postsecondary Employment

2. Student Performance

3. Learning Environment

4. School Safety and Environment

5. Professional Teachers and Staff

6. Adult Literacy

7. Parent Involvement

School improvement plans are based on an analysis of student achievement and other school performance data and include each school's mission or philosophy in support of the district mission, a needs assessment, activities to address state goals and performance standards, evaluation methods, definitions of adequate progress, documentation of adequate progress, and requests for waivers. In addition, the plans provide a description of school interventions, a link to the district's strategic plan, and implementation responsibilities, timelines, and budget resources.

The district's Comprehensive Curriculum Plan (CCP) outlines detailed goals, objectives, and action plans for the division of curriculum and instructional services in support of the district's educational services program. The plan is aligned with the district's strategic plan and state educational goals, and it provides implementation responsibilities and timelines. Through the CCP, the district has implemented goals and measurable objectives for all educational programs. For each program, the CCP groups program goals under three main sections as displayed in Exhibit 3-2 below.

Exhibit 3-2
The Comprehensive Curriculum Plan Structure
Groups Program Goals into Three Main Sections

Section	Goals	Description
I		**Support for Instructional Leadership:**
	A	Accessing instructional materials and media.
	B	Complying with local, state, and federal regulations.
	C	Fostering school/parent communication.
	D	Training teachers in best practices for instruction
	E	Providing curriculum guides for at least those areas covered by the Sunshine State Standards.
II		**Support for Academic Achievement:**
	A	Assessing student performance for instructional planning.
	B	Assessing student performance for classroom instructional planning.
	C	Infusing vocational and/or applied skills into all coursework.
	D	Implementing multicultural/diversity education.
	E	Teaching higher order thinking skills.
	F	Teaching the Sunshine State Standards.
	G	Using technology in instruction.
III		**Support for Accountability:**
	A	Evaluating instructional programs for effectiveness and cost-efficiency.
	B	Using technology in instruction.

Source: Alachua County School District Comprehensive Curriculum Plan.

Conclusions and Recommendations ————

Summary of Conclusions for Performance Accountability Systems Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
Goals and Measurable Objectives	1. The district has clearly stated goals and measurable objectives that can be achieved within budget for each major educational and operational program. These major programs are Basic Education (K-3, 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. [1]	No	3-5
	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	3-10
	3. The district clearly reports on the performance and cost-efficiency of its major educational and operational programs to ensure accountability to parents and other taxpayers.	Yes	3-11

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

GOALS AND MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES

Best Practice 1: Not Using

Although the Alachua County School District has district-wide goals and measurable objectives for all its educational programs within its CCP, the goals focus on process and output rather than outcomes and are not used consistently.

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 Alachua County School District has a comprehensive planning process that includes annual reporting of the progress it has made in implementing the action plans in its strategic plan. It also has established school-level measurable outcome objectives for its basic education programs in its school improvement plans. These plans contain student achievement data for the previous two years and establish standards for the progress the school would like its students to achieve during the upcoming year.

However, the district does not use this best practice for several reasons. First, it has not established district-wide measurable outcome measures and standards for all of its educational programs including those for basic, exceptional, and at-risk students. The strategies and action plans in its strategic and curriculum plans focus on processes and outputs rather than outcomes. Although this allows the district to determine whether specific action plans have been implemented, it does not allow it to determine the effects of that implementation on student performance. Also, the district evaluates its basic educational programs utilizing consistently only one, goal No. 3 "Student Performance," out of the 7 goals included in the strategic plan.

Second, the district has not formally established measurable objectives for its operational programs. Some departments have created informal performance measures. For example, the transportation department annually reports performance data to the Department of Education and has created a short-term plan that contains some performance measures. It has also compared its performance on some of these measures to that of peer districts. Food Services has also created performance measures, but these measures are not linked to the goals in the strategic plan. As shown in Exhibit 3-3, the district does not have quantifiable performance measures for its other operational programs. Actions recommended for improvement are also included in the Exhibit.

Exhibit 3-3
Actions to Improve Goals and Objectives of Operational Programs

Operational Program	Goals		Measurable Objectives		Action for Improvement
	Yes/No	Statement/ Concern	Yes/No	Statement/ Concern	
Transportation	Yes	Established short- and a long- term plans (goals).	No	Goals have not been developed into measurable objectives.	Develop short- and long-term plan (goals) into measurable objectives. For additional detail, refer to Chapter 9, Student Transportation, Best Practice 20.
Facilities Construction and Maintenance	No	While goals are included in the Strategic Plan, said goals do not represent the totality of goals that the program should have.	No	These goals have not been developed into measurable objectives.	Develop program-specific objectives that will enable the district to assess progress toward reaching the goals. Develop and implement accountability mechanisms to ensure performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the program. For additional detail, refer to Chapter 7, Facilities Construction, Best Practice 23. For additional detail, refer to Chapter 8, Facilities Maintenance, Best Practice 20.
Food Service	No	While goals are included in the Strategic Plan, said goals do not represent the totality of goals that the program should have.	No	Goals have not been developed into measurable objectives.	Establish goal statements that describe what the program is trying to achieve. For additional detail, refer to Chapter 10, Food Service Operations, Best Practice 10. Develop adequate measurable objectives that assess the efficiency of the program, such as "by September 2003, reduce spoilage of stocked non-refrigerated food stock items to one-half of one percent of items in stock." For additional detail, refer to Chapter 10, Food Service Operations, Best Practice 10.
Safety and Security	Yes	There is only one goal, and it is included in the Strategic Plan.	Yes	The district has objectives that could be measurable, but more effort is needed to establish measurable goals.	Develop more meaningful measurable objectives, such as "by the end of school year 2002-03, reduce the incidence of vandalism of school property by 5%."

Source: Alachua County School District, complied by ValienteHernandez, P.A., May 2003.

Third, the operational programs also have not developed formal benchmarks or searched for industry standards with which to compare their performance. There are many sources of information in both public and private industry that can be used for benchmarking. Exhibit 3-4 presents some suggested performance measures for operational programs. Program directors can collect and use performance data on short-term operational objectives to routinely monitor performance. They can present data on longer-term objectives the school board or public to indicate objectives are moving in the right direction.

Exhibit 3-4
Examples of Performance Measures for Operational Programs

Facilities Maintenance
- Customer satisfaction with the quality of grounds work
- Average Cleaning/maintenance cost per square foot
- Square feet maintained per Facilities Maintenance
- Number of user complaints
- Percent of work orders completed within X number of days
- Percent of FMs completed on schedule
- Percent of quality checks meeting standard
- Average number of days to institute routine repairs
- Estimated savings from energy conservation measures
- Percent of emergency repairs completed within one day of notification
- Average amount of time spent per work order
- Average cost per maintenance request
- Average facilities maintenance cost per square foot
- Average maintenance and repair cost per square foot
- Average supervisory cost per square foot

Facilities Construction
- Average number of days for selection of design consultant from project assignment
- Average number of days for selection of construction consultant from project assignment
- Number of consultant engineer contracts administered
- Number of in-house designs completed
- Number of inspections completed
- Number of construction/capital projects managed
- Percent of inspection cost to project cost
- Percent of design cost to project cost
- Inspection cost per hour
- Percent of capital projects completed within estimated time
- Average number of hours required to provide preliminary planning review for capital improvement projects

Student Transportation
- Number of accidents/100,000 miles
- Number of preventable accidents/100,000 miles
- Number of parent complaints per week or satisfaction based on principal and student surveys
- Number of buses arriving late/incidents per month
- Percentage of trips missed
- Percentage of trips on schedules
- Percentage of breakdowns
- Percentage of courtesy students served
- Cost per pupil trip or per mile
- Average bus occupancy for regular, ESE, and magnet transportation
- Driver and other employee turnover

For vehicle maintenance staff should consider the following performance measures.
- Downtime of buses, measured as days out of service or turnaround time for scheduled and corrective maintenance by type of vehicle

- Number of breakdowns per 100,000 miles
- Average maintenance cost per mile by type of school bus

Other performance indicators may be selected based on local interest and data availability.

Food Services

- Meals per labor hour
- Costs per meal
- Total meal participation for breakfast, lunch, and other feeding programs
- Increase or decrease in meals purchased from the previous period

Source: Best Financial Management Practices Review of the Lake County School District, Report No. 01-68, Chapter 4: Performance Accountability Systems, 2001 and ValienteHernandez, 2003.

Developing and implementing an adequate set of performance measures for each major program would improve the district's ability to make informed decisions regarding issues such as:

- Increasing or decreasing the funds allocated to different programs;

- Continuing or eliminating programs due to low performance levels;

- Outsourcing programs or services under a program;

- Implementing new strategies or programs;

- Determining whether services are being provided in the most cost-effective manner.

To improve its ability to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of its educational and operational programs, the district should develop an accountability system that includes outcomes for all its programs. This system should be integrated with the district's planning processes, with higher level outcome measures being part of the strategic plan and lower level interim outcome or process measures being part of department or school plans and linked to the budget.

Action Plan 3-1

We recommend that the district develop accountability measurement systems for all its educational and operational programs and use performance data to inform management of adequate progress and make informed policy decisions.	
Action Needed	Step 1. The superintendent should assign the director of the Testing and Research Department to work with principals and educational and operational directors to develop performance measures, including outcome and efficiency measures for all programs. This process should be integrated with the district's planning processes.
	Step 2. Operational executive directors and directors should identify input and outcome measures and indicators of efficiency and effectiveness. Focus should be on desired results and outcomes, not just activities. Each measure should be clearly defined, and staff must make sure that measures are adequate.
	Step 3. Operational executive directors and directors should identify how performance measures link to the budget and the measures in the strategic plan.
	Step 4. Program directors and supervisors review program-level performance measures with staff of each major program to ensure that the measures: • Meet district expectations and • Clearly and logically relate to those developed at various other district administrative levels such as those in school improvement plans and the strategic plan.
	Step 5. For each performance measure, operational executive directors and directors should identify the data needed and provide the information below. • Who will collect performance data and how often? What is the source of the data (e.g., state or district reports)? • In what format is the data needed? • How often should the data be collected? • Who (program staff, department head, assistant superintendent, superintendent, school board) will the data are reported to and how often? • How should the data be used?
	Step 6. For each performance measure, the operational executive directors and directors should identify benchmarks the district should adopt as standards or expectations for performance to be achieved within the next budget cycle.
	Step 7. The proposed measures and standards should be presented to the superintendent and board for approval.
	Step 8. The superintendent should direct all schools and divisions to collect data on the measures.
	Step 9. Operational executive directors and directors should periodically evaluate the performance and cost-efficiency measures.
	Step 10. Operational executive directors and directors should select a few critical performance and cost-efficiency measures that should be reported periodically to school board members, superintendent, parents, and taxpayers to demonstrate how well the program is performing. The district could use communication resources such as TV broadcasting, brochures, web page, and schools' bulletin boards.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Research and Evaluation with assistance and support from School Directors, Assistants, All major programs' Executive Directors, Program Directors, Director of the Division of Curriculum and Instructional Services.
Time Frame	December 2003

Best Practice 2: Not Using

While the district informally evaluates the performance of its major educational programs, formal evaluation of the performance and costs of its major educational and operational programs would allow district officials to use evaluation results improve programs.

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 Alachua County School District has formally evaluated its management structures, and has reviwed aspects of a number of the district's educational programs. For example, with 27% of its student population in 2001-02 classified as Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students, district staff reviews a variety of academic and non-academic indicators to assess ESE student performance and to evaluate the program as a whole. In addition, data for at-risk students in the ESOL, Title I and alternative education programs are reviewed. Overall, evaluations target a range of issues including identification and placement timing, appropriateness, inclusion and disproportionality rates, and services provided for students. The district also reviewed aspects of its accelerated programs using school-level and district-level assessments, however, these evaluations do not include student academic and non-academic indicators as measures of success, nor does the district assess the number and type of programs offered. Finally, the district evaluates its workforce development programs based on 10 indicators of student and program performance (see Educational Service Delivery, Chapter 4, Best Practices 2, 3, 4 and 5 for more information).

However, the district is not using this best practice because it has not established a systematic approach to evaluating major educational and operational programs, using either district employees or by employing outside consultants. These types of evaluations would help the district pinpoint potential problems and develop solutions to them.

Because evaluations can be costly, the district needs mechanisms and criteria to determine which programs or strategies to evaluate. One such mechanism is to develop an accountability system and direct evaluation resources toward programs that are not achieving their objectives. In addition, the district may wish to initiate evaluations in response to areas receiving expressions of public discontent or having a need for risk analyses. In this way, the district can ensure that it will effectively target its limited resources toward the most needed evaluations.

Action Plan 3-2

We recommend that the district use its accountability system and other mechanisms to identify programs or strategies in need of evaluation and conduct evaluations of these programs or strategies.		
Action needed	Step 1.	The district should use the accountability system recommended in Action Plan 3-1 and other appropriate criteria to identify programs or activities in need of evaluation. Other criteria could include high-cost or high-risk activities or public discontent with a program or activity.
	Step 2.	Once it identifies the evaluation subject, the district should determine how to best conduct the evaluation. Options could include an in-house evaluation conducted by employees that are independent of the program/ activity being evaluated or a contracted study. Other districts have worked with university schools of education to assist them in such studies.
	Step 3.	The district should publish the evaluation report and present any recommendation(s) to the board for approval.
Who is responsible	Director of Research and Evaluation with the support of the Superintendent and Board to help recommend the programs or activities to be evaluated.	
Timeframe	December 2004	

Best Practice 3: Using

The district reports the performance of its basic educational programs to ensure accountability to parents and other taxpayers, but it needs to improve its performance measures and report data on the improved measures.

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

The Alachua County School District reports the performance of its basic educational programs to the board and the public. It publishes school grades and FCAT test scores on its Internet web site. In addition, it annually reports the progress it has made in implementing the goals and objectives in its strategic plan to the board, which uses the report to establish budget priorities. However, it could improve these status reports by implementing Action Plan 3-1 to develop measurable goals and objectives and collect performance data for all of its major programs.

4 Educational Service Delivery

Summary

The Alachua County School District is using 9 of the 12 educational service delivery best practices. The district effectively uses academic and non-academic data for curriculum planning and decision-making and serves students in at-risk, accelerated, and work force development programs. In addition, the district generally provides good instructional support including textbooks, media centers and support services. To use the remaining best practice standards and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its educational service delivery program and monitor the placement and evaluation process for Exceptional Student Education services. In addition, the district should seek Medicaid reimbursement for eligible services, ensure school improvement plans include measurable objectives to guide improvement in student performance, and improve the use of technology as an instructional tool.

WAYS TO SAVE
Sharpening the Pencil

As seen in Exhibit 4-1, the district has two opportunities to increase revenues in this area. Determining whether to take advantage of these opportunities is a district decision and should be based on many factors including district needs, public input, and school board priorities. If the district implements these strategies, 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 4-1
Our Review Identified Several Ways the District Could Reduce Costs
and Increase Revenues in the Area of Educational Service Delivery

| Best Practice No. | Ways to Save | | | | | |
	Year 2003-04	Year 2004-05	Year 2005-06	Year 2006-07	Year 2007-08	Total
2 Maximize Medicaid reimbursements	$266,389	$266,389	$266,389	$266,389	$266,389	$1,331,945
9 Maximize lost/damaged textbook collections	$3,646	$11,662	$20,260	$28,076	$36,674	$100,318
Total	$270,035	$278,051	$286,649	$294,465	$303,063	$1,432,263

Background ————————————————

The Alachua County School District served 29,662 students during the 2001-02 school year with an ethnic breakdown of 54% white; non-Hispanic; 37% black; non-Hispanic; 4% Hispanic; 3% Asian/Pacific Islander; 2% multiracial; and less than 1% American Indian/Alaskan native. The district provides education services to 24 elementary schools, 8 middle schools, 7 high schools, 4 Department of Juvenile Justice Schools, and 6 other types of schools. The district also supports 10 charter schools.

As Exhibit 4-2 shows, the Alachua County School District's student enrollment has decreased over the past five years. The district has the lowest percentage of students served in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program compared to peers but has a very high percentage of ESE students. The percentage of students who are eligible for the free or reduced priced lunch is comparable to its peers and the state average.

Exhibit 4-2
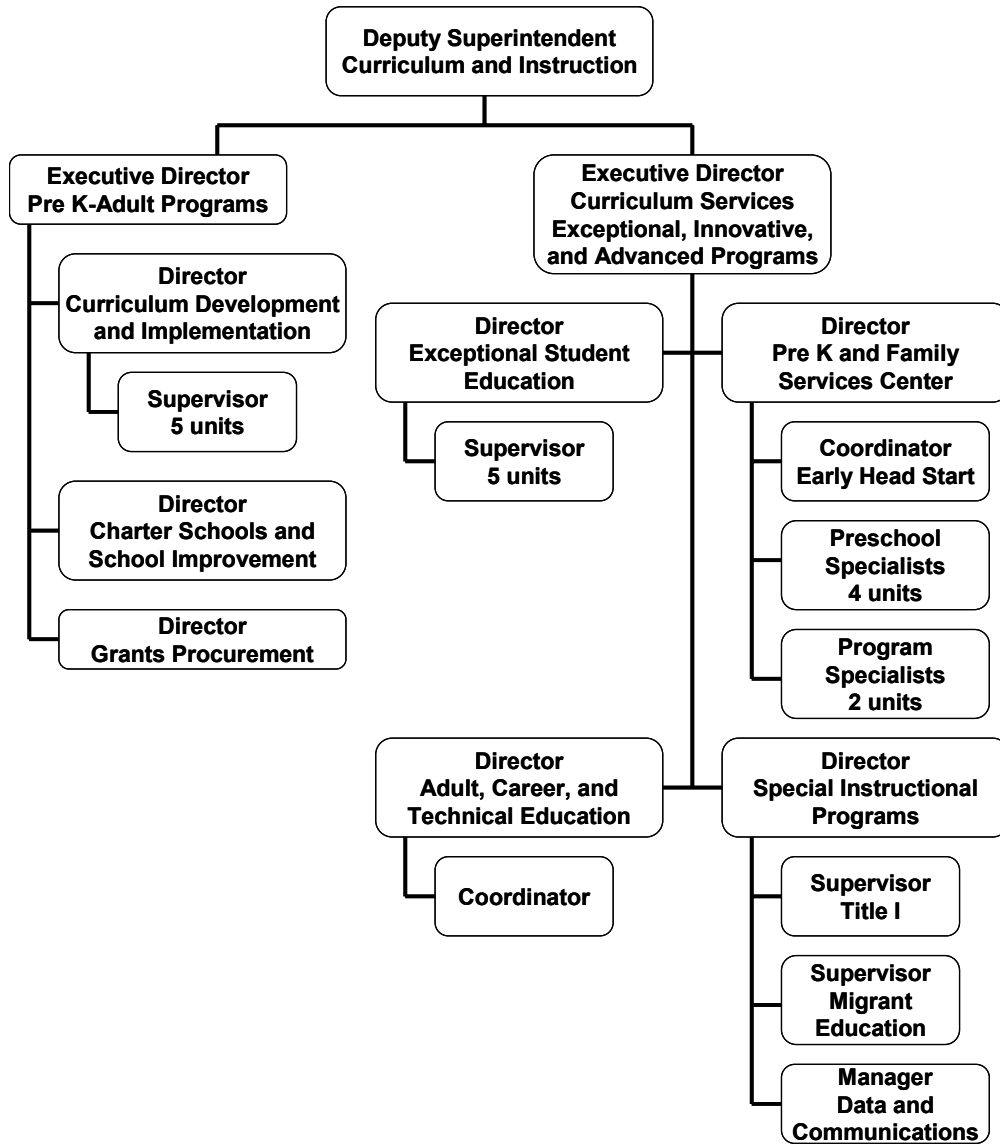**Alachua County School District Student Demographics**

District	Total Students (2001-02)	Percentage Change 1997-2001	English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)[1]	Percentage of Exceptional Students	Percentage Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch
Alachua	29,662	-1%	1%	27%	44%
Bay	26,058	-1%	4%	21%	44%
Collier	36,515	8%	13%	19%	44%
Lake	30,678	9%	3%	19%	39%
Marion	39,330	1%	2%	20%	51%
St. Lucie	30,587	1%	5%	20%	51%
State	2,499,781	9%	8%	19%	44%

[1] The percentages listed for ESOL students in each of the peer districts reflects end of the 2001-02 school year statistics.

Source: DOE Profiles of Florida School Districts 1997-2002.

The Alachua County School District's deputy superintendent of curriculum and instruction supervises the seven departments that provide instructional and support services to the district's schools: Curriculum Development and Implementation; Charter Schools and School Improvement; Grants Procurement; Exceptional Student Education; Pre-K—Family Services; Adult, Career, and Technical Education; and Special Instructional Programs. These departments provide services including curriculum development, instructional strategies, school improvement, and administrative/reporting activities. As shown in Exhibit 4-3, two executive directors report to the deputy superintendent.

Exhibit 4-3
Seven District Departments Perform the District Level
Educational Service Delivery Functions, Effective July 2003

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                        ┌────────────────────────────┐
                        │   Deputy Superintendent     │
                        │  Curriculum and Instruction │
                        └────────────────────────────┘
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- **Deputy Superintendent Curriculum and Instruction**
  - **Executive Director Pre K-Adult Programs**
    - **Director Curriculum Development and Implementation**
      - **Supervisor 5 units**
    - **Director Charter Schools and School Improvement**
    - **Director Grants Procurement**
  - **Executive Director Curriculum Services Exceptional, Innovative, and Advanced Programs**
    - **Director Exceptional Student Education**
      - **Supervisor 5 units**
    - **Director Pre K and Family Services Center**
      - **Coordinator Early Head Start**
      - **Preschool Specialists 4 units**
      - **Program Specialists 2 units**
    - **Director Adult, Career, and Technical Education**
      - **Coordinator**
    - **Director Special Instructional Programs**
      - **Supervisor Title I**
      - **Supervisor Migrant Education**
      - **Manager Data and Communications**

Source: Alachua County School District. 2003.

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

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

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

Exceptional Student Education (ESE). Exceptional Student Education serves students who meet specific federal and state criteria. In Florida, an "exceptional student" is a student with disabilities or a student who is gifted and is enrolled in (or eligible for enrollment in) a district public school. School districts must provide students with disabilities and students who are gifted the opportunity to receive a free appropriate public education that will maximize their learning. Schools use a variety of strategies, such as modifying schedules, changing teachers, or varying instructional techniques to help ESE students meet their potential and succeed in the classroom. Districts identify students who are eligible for ESE programs and provide special education programs and related services to meet the individual needs of those students. The percentage of Alachua County School District students identified and served in the district's ESE program (28% in 2002-03) is higher than all its peers and the state average. Nineteen percent of the district's students have disabilities while 9% are gifted.

At-Risk Programs. The Alachua County School District provides several programs for students who need academic or social skills interventions to assist them to be successful including Title I, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and alternative education programs. Title I programs offer ancillary support services to students who need assistance by providing instruction that reinforces the curriculum and helps students with deficient skills. Title I teachers and teacher assistants help regular classroom teachers by working with students to increase their proficiency in identified skill areas. Title I is funded by both federal and state sources and provides services to schools with high concentrations of poverty as determined by the number of students who receive free or reduced lunch. For a school to qualify for school-wide Title I services, 40% or more of its students must meet the criteria for a free or reduced price lunch. Title I provides targeted assistance to students in its other schools who meet eligibility criteria. Alachua County School District has 26 schools, including 8 charter schools, that are served school-wide by the Title I program, and 4 schools, including 1 charter, that receive targeted assistance through the program.

As noted earlier, the percentage of students in the district's ESOL program is very low. The ESOL program serves 492 students or 1% of the student population. The district places ESOL students in regular classrooms, known as the inclusion approach. School administrators identify ESOL students using a home language survey administered through the ESOL district office. Guidance counselors ensure student progress and that needs are met. To exit the program, students must achieve certain reading and writing criteria.

The district also offers several alternative education programs. One such program, Horizon/New Pathways, places students with discipline problems in an alternative setting. Teachers assist these students in establishing specific behavioral and academic goals and regularly evaluate their progress.

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

The Advanced Placement program allows high-achieving and self-motivated students in grades 11 and 12 to enroll in advanced courses of study and earn college credit and/or advanced placement credit while still enrolled in high school. The district began offering AP courses in response to parent and teacher input. The district offers a variety of AP courses including English, Calculus, and Physics.

Dual Enrollment programs allow high school students to enroll in courses for both high school and college credit. These courses can be academic, with credit applied toward an associate or baccalaureate degree or vocational, to help meet vocational certificate requirements. A district agreement with Santa Fe

Community College (SFCC) allows students to attend classes at the high school or at one of the SFCC campuses.

Alachua County School District students may also take advanced courses through the Florida Virtual School. Students who enroll in this on-line school take classes for graduation credit over the Internet, allowing them to learn at their own pace or enroll in classes not offered at their school. Teachers or district administrators proctor required exams.

Vocational and Adult Education. The district's secondary vocational and technical education program served 5,575 students during the 2001-02 school year and 5,516 during the 2002-03 school year. The program offers eight academy programs including: the Academy of Construction, the Academy of Finance, the Institute of Health Professions, the Criminal Justice Academy, the Academy of Entrepreneurship, the Academy of Information Technology (new 2000-01), the Academy of Agriscience, and the Institute of Culinary Arts. The academy courses prepare students for postsecondary work and develop job-ready skills. The district also offers a variety of courses, aside from the institutes, for students in general education programs.

Student Support Services. In the Alachua County School District, the Student Services Department provides psychological services and guidance services. The district, along with the Alachua County Health Department, provides school health services. Student support services provide support outside of the classroom, to help students overcome problems that could interfere with their academic success and to broaden their educational experience.

Activities of Particular Interest

Some school districts have developed programs that are especially noteworthy and can serve as a model for other school districts to follow. In the Alachua County School District, these noteworthy models include the creation of the GEAR-UP program, a comprehensive health services program, and a student support plan for each school.

The GEAR-UP Program. In the 1999-2000 school year, the district instituted the GEAR-UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) program at Howard Bishop Middle School, Lincoln Middle School, and Eastside High School. The program supports middle and high school students identified as potential dropouts for intervention and focuses on student academic performance, behavior / discipline, absenteeism, parent participation, and professional development for faculty and staff. In the 2001-02 school year, from one nine week period to the next, participating students' discipline referrals decreased an average of 46%, while the percentage of students who earned F's decreased an average of 40%, and the number of students with 5 or more absences decreased an average of 46%.

School Health Services Program. The Alachua County School District's Student Services employs a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) or Registered Nurse (RNs) nurse in every school. The county health department pays for these positions. Most districts in Florida have a limited number of nurses shared by all schools.

Student Services Support Plan. Each school has its own Student Services Support Plan designed to meet specific health and social needs of the school population, compared to most Florida districts that develop a single plan for the entire district.

Conclusions and Recommendations————

Summary of Conclusions for Educational Service Delivery Best Practices

Practice Area		Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
Effective and Efficient Instructional Programs	1.	District administrators use both academic and nonacademic data to guide them in their decision-making about improving K-12 education programs.	Yes	4-7
	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).	Yes	4-12
	4.	The district provides an appropriate range of accelerated programs (such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and Dual Enrollment).	Yes	4-14
	5.	The district provides effective and efficient workforce development programs (such as vocational-technical, adult basic education, and adult high school programs).	Yes	4-15
	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	4-17
	7.	The district ensures effective progression of students from kindergarten through grade 12 that maximizes student mastery of the Sunshine State Standards and prepares students for work and continued education.	Yes	4-18
	8.	The district's organizational structure and staffing of educational programs minimizes administrative layers and processes.	Yes	4-20
Effective and Efficient Instructional Support	9.	The district ensures that students and teachers have sufficient current textbooks and other instructional materials available to support instruction in core subjects and to meet the needs of teachers and students.	Yes	4-21
	10.	The district has sufficient school library or media centers to support instruction.	Yes	4-22
	11.	The district utilizes instructional technology in the classroom to enhance curriculum and improve student achievement.	No	4-23
	12.	The district provides necessary support services (guidance counseling, psychological, social work and health) to meet student needs and to ensure students are able to learn.	Yes	4-23

EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

Best Practice 1: Using

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

Effective school districts use academic and nonacademic data to drive decisions related to their instructional programs and to improve the performance of all students. To use 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 Alachua County School District disaggregates data by school and by subgroup for evaluation, although it does not disaggregate data from school-based remedial programs. The district primarily uses this information for internal process change. On a limited basis, the district also compares its performance against peer and state averages. District administrators use academic and nonacademic performance measures to evaluate and improve some programs and various data indicators show that students generally perform well. The district identifies achievement gaps and takes steps to address these needs.

District personnel disaggregate data for the following subgroups of students: low-SES (socio-economic status), ESOL, Title I, minority, gifted, advanced programs, and to some extent, alternative education. The district uses the disaggregated data to improve programs and to assess student performance. The district uses student achievement data for needs assessments and in all school improvement plans to measure whether student progress is adequate.

The district generates the FCAT Disaggregated Achievement Report, which is broken-down by socio-economic status (determined by eligibility for a free or reduced price lunch) and by race, to identify trends and issues for students. Over the last several years, the district has focused on reading and math gain scores for African-American fourth and fifth graders. These analyses were instrumental in steering the district to fund a new K-5 basal reading series and to provide teachers with math in-service training. In addition, during the 2002-03 school year the district compared the mean scale scores of grade 3 FCAT Reading and Mathematics results to five districts (Leon, Okaloosa, Bay, Clay, and Lake). However, only one of these districts has similar student characteristics and future efforts should include comparisons with more similar districts.

> **We recommend that the district continue its recent efforts to compare relevant academic and nonacademic data against other district and state performances but compare performance to peer districts with more similar student characteristics.**

In general, students in the Alachua County School District perform well on a variety of academic and non-academic indicators. Comparative analyses of 2002 FCAT Reading, Mathematics, and Writing scores for grades 4, 8, and 10 show that the district generally performs higher than the state average and its peer districts. A four-year analysis of SAT scores (1998-2002) reveals that the percentage of students tested has increased while the average score has remained relatively unchanged. In addition, the district's SAT scores are higher than peer and state averages. A three-year analysis of ACT scores (1998-2001)

also reveals that although the percentage of students tested has increased, the scores have generally remained the same, with district scores higher than three of its peer districts and the state average.

Alachua's graduation rate, which improved from 61.2% in 2000-01 to 66.1% in 2001-02 was still lower than all its peers (range of 67.9% to 77.0%) and the state average for 2001-02. Conversely, the district's dropout rate decreased from 6.1% in 2000-01 to 5.2% in 2001-02, but remains higher than its peers (range 1.5% to 4.9%) and the state average. For 2001-02 Alachua had a lower percentage of in-school suspensions and a higher percentage of out-of-school suspensions, but overall, suspensions were comparable with peer and state rates. The district has not yet identified a cause for the relatively low graduation rate or the relatively high drop-out rate, and officials are currently reviewing program and student academic and nonacademic data to identify causes and possible solutions.

> **We recommend that the district use program and student academic and nonacademic data to identify causes of high drop-out and low graduation rates and develop strategies for improvement.**

The district has implemented initiatives to address achievement gaps for district student subpopulations. These initiatives include the *Framework for High School Literacy Program* (2001), four grant programs, Compass Learning Lab, tracking the enrollment of minority students in advanced courses, and the extensive data analysis for low-performing schools.

Best Practice 2: Not Using

While the district performs well on indicators related to the effectiveness of Exceptional Student Education, the district could improve the efficiency of the ESE programs on several measures related to funding and placement.

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 use 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 Alachua County School District identifies and appropriately places ESE students, offers appropriate instructional strategies for student success, and provides appropriate training and support to both special and regular education teachers. District officials evaluate the success of the ESE programs regularly, and these students perform well on relevant academic and non-academic indicators. The district could improve its ESE programs by identifying and placing students in a timelier manner consistent with state guidelines, maximizing Medicaid reimbursement billing, and continuing to address disproportionality issues.

The district's Special Programs and Procedures manual outlines the procedures used to identify and assess students, develop individual education plans (IEPs), provide and coordinate services for designated students, and transition students from the ESE program into regular classrooms. The document is current, board-adopted, consistent with state and federal laws, and each school maintains several copies for reference. To ensure procedures are up-to-date and consistent with laws, the director requires the ESE Department annually reviews the document, which is then submitted to both the school board and the Department of Education.

The district's ESE students perform well on a variety of academic and nonacademic indicators, as evidenced by district and state reports. On the 2001-02 FCAT, Alachua's ESE students compared favorably against peers, ranking the highest in Grade 10 Reading scores, higher than all but two peers

(Collier, Lake) in Grade 10 Math scores, higher than all but two peers (Bay, St. Lucie) in Grade 8 Reading, and higher than all but one peer (Collier) in Grade 8 Math. Alachua is the only district among its peers that has consistently increased ESE FCAT participation for all grades compared to peers. Notably, for ESE students from the 1998-99 school year through 2001-02, the district increased ESE student FCAT participation from 75% to 85% for Grade 5 Math and from 73% to 83% for Grade 4 Reading.

The district's ESE students generally have better graduation rates and lower dropout rates than in peer districts. Alachua, along with St. Lucie, has the highest percentage of students with disabilities graduating with standard diplomas compared to peer districts (Exhibit 4-4). Of note, although Alachua's graduation rate for students with disabilities has fluctuated over the past several years, the percentage of students graduating shows an overall positive trend. District officials suggest that the years showing increases in this rate may be due to additional mainstream supports for standard diploma students, such as support facilitation and co-teach models that were not offered as frequently in the past. In addition, Alachua, with a <1% dropout rate for students with disabilities, has the lowest rate as compared to its peers (Exhibit 4-4).

Exhibit 4-4
Compared to Peer Districts, More of Alachua's Students With Disabilities Graduate With a Standard Diploma and Fewer Drop-Out, 2001-02

District	Graduation rate	Drop-out rate
Alachua	56%	<1%
Bay	49%	3%
Collier	51%	5%
Lake	49%	8%
Marion	35%	5%
St. Lucie	56%	3%
State	48%	5%

Source: LEA Profiles of School Districts, 2003.

To improve the ESE program, the district is placing more students with disabilities in less restrictive learning environments. According to 2002-03 Department of Education documentation, the district's placement of ESE students in regular classes (least restrictive environment) has increased over a three-year period. In the 2000-01 school year, 42% of students aged 6-21 spent 80% or more of their school week with non-disabled peers. That number increased to 45% in 2001-02, and to 58% in 2002-03.

However, district and state officials have identified inclusion issues for other groups of ESE students, especially for EMH students. Department of Education data shows that the amount of time EMH students spend in regular classrooms has decreased over the three-year period from 69% (2000-01) to 55% (2002-03). To improve the rate of inclusion the district has initiated several strategies. Using DOE funding, the district works with the University of Florida to promote inclusive classrooms through Project Include. Project Include has two primary purposes. First, the project supports the efforts of teams of teachers and administrators to develop and implement plans that improve schools' inclusion programs. Second, the project provides professional development activities to assist teachers and administrators in meeting the needs of students with disabilities (and others who need support) in inclusive settings. Over the past two years, teams of teachers and administrators from eight elementary schools have participated in the project. The district also participates in the *Florida Inclusion Network.* Finally, in conjunction with DOE, the district developed a three-year Continuous Improvement/Self-Monitoring Plan. One goal for the 2002-03 school year focused on increasing the time that EMH students spend with non-disabled peers. To improve this rate and address all inclusion issues, the district should continue implementing the

strategies in the Continuous Improvement Plan, including the student case studies, classroom observation, teacher training, and parent surveys, and adjust the strategies in this plan as needed.

However, the district is not using this best practice for three reasons. First, although the district's procedures comply with the law, the district has difficulty demonstrating that it identifies and places eligible ESE students within recommended timeliness guidelines. The district tracks placement by school, but does not routinely track the length of time from referral to placement. This information is available in individual files and for this review, the district analyzed its data for 2001-02 and determined that 77% of students were identified and placed within 60 days. The district did not determine the extent of delay for the remaining 23% of placements. Action Plan 4-1 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Action Plan 4-1

We recommend that the district monitor placement data to ensure the timely evaluation and placement of ESE students.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop a district-wide system to track the different stages of the 60-day referral process. These stages should include time from completed referral to testing; from testing to report; from report to eligibility staffing, and from staffing to placement.
	Step 2.	Use the data to identify patterns or probable causes for students that are not identified and placed within 60 days.
	Step 3.	Use these findings to improve procedures by providing added support or amending procedures.
	Step 4.	Establish a consolidated report with date of completed referral to date of eligibility staffing.
	Step 5.	Track placement data quarterly, ensuring timely placement into programs.
Who Is Responsible	ESE director, student services director	
Time Frame	October 2003 to complete the review and establish new procedures; assessment of performance will be ongoing..	

Second, the district does not maximize Medicaid reimbursement by billing for all services for which it is cost-effective. Currently, as part of current job responsibilities, an ESE secretary bills for Medicaid reimbursement for administrative services and physical therapy services only. The district does not seek reimbursement for occupational therapy, speech and language services, or behavioral services due to a lack of clerical staff to complete the billing. The potential Medicaid funding for the complete range of services is estimated by multiplying the estimated number of Medicaid eligible students in Alachua (2,351) by the estimated revenue for each service the student receives, less the expected revenue for services already billed and the average cost for a clerical position (including salary and benefits). [1] Based on this calculation, the district could realize an additional $266,389 per year or $1,331,945 over five years. Action Plan 4-2 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

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[1] The total expected increased revenue for billing Medicaid services, excluding administrative funds, is $308,628 each year ($1,543,140 for 5 years), less and expected $12,239 each year for already billed physical therapy services ($61,195 for 5 years), less $30,000 each year clerical salary and benefits ($150,000 for five years) yields $266,389 per year ($1,331,945 for five years).

Action Plan 4-2

We recommend that the district seek Medicaid reimbursement for all services provided, using reimbursements to offset increased clerical support.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	In addition to services currently billed, begin to bill Medicaid for all eligible services not currently billed including Occupational Therapy, Speech-Language Services, and Behavioral Services.
	Step 2.	Add a clerical position to the department to mange increases in paperwork for the additional billing.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Exceptional Student Education (or designee)	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Third, the district has not assessed the effectiveness of its Continuous Monitoring Improvement Plan designed to reduce disproportionality among ESE student placements. The district developed strategies as part of the Continuous Monitoring Improvement Plan to increase minority participation in both the gifted program and to decrease the proportion of EMH students who are African American. The district analyzed school-level data including the number of referrals for ESE evaluation by race/ethnicity, and the number of eligibility determinations for the ESE program by race/ethnicity. Some of the strategies designed to address these issues are as follows:

- actively involve parents in more pre-referral interventions;

- standardize the Educational Planning Team (EPT) pre-referral process across the district;

- provide a wide variety of pre-referral supports and appropriate individualized interventions that are multi-culturally sensitive;

- seek early intervention; and

- provide relevant professional development and training.

The ESE program continues to have a disproportionate number of African American students in some ESE programs; although the district is improving placement for these students within the gifted program (Exhibit 4-5). The district has also attempted to increase the relatively low proportion of students with limited English proficiency and those with low socio-economic status for referral into the gifted program. Efforts in 2001-02 and 2002-03 school years, included in-service training on screening procedures for gifted teachers and guidance counselors to increase future referrals. However, other than tracking African American participation rates, the district is not monitoring referrals or participation rates for other underrepresented groups of students. As a result, the district cannot determine whether its efforts have increased referral and participation rates for all underrepresented students.

Exhibit 4-5
The Percentage of African American Students
in the Gifted Program Has Increased Since 1999

	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
White	78.2%	72.2%	77%	75%
African American	9.8%	10.3%	11%	13%
Hispanic	4.5%	4.2%	4%	4%
Other	7.5%	13.3%	<7%	8%

Source: Florida Department of Education Statistical Briefs, Membership in Programs for Exceptional Students, 1999-03.

African American students continue to be represented at disproportionate rates in other ESE programs. An October 2001 peer comparison of ethnicities in SLD (specific learning disabled), EH/SED (emotionally handicapped/severely emotionally disturbed), and EMH (educable mentally handicapped)

programs showed a relatively high percentage of African American students identified for these programs. In Alachua County School District, 54% of students identified as SLD were African American compared to the peer range of 13% to 32%. In addition, 68% of Alachua's EH/SED students were African American, while the peer range was 18% to 39%. African American students represented 69% of the EMH students in the Alachua district, while the peer range was 34% to 68%.

The district's has not assessed whether any of the strategies implemented in the monitoring plan are effectively addressing these issues. Action Plan 4-3 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Action Plan 4-3

We recommend that the district evaluate the strategies in the Continuous Monitoring Plan.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Ensure the plan's goals are SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, reasonable, time-bounded),
	Step 2.	Track the number of ESE placements (by race and other indicators) and review data to ensure that the proportionality of ESE student is within the acceptable range and to identify which strategies have been effective in reducing disproportionality.
	Step 3.	Use data to assess Continuous Monitoring Plan goals and adjust goals and strategies as necessary.
	Step 4.	Continue to research and implement methods of reducing current disproportionality issues.
Who Is Responsible	Exceptional student education supervisor	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Best Practice 3: Using

The district provides efficient programs to meet the needs of at-risk students, but can enhance efforts to evaluate alternative education programs.

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 use this best practice, school districts should periodically assess the academic and social needs of their students and use this information to identify or develop programs to meet those needs. To increase student success, districts should promote parent involvement and provide teachers adequate training and support. Districts should also periodically assess the progress of at-risk students, making adjustments to programs as needed to ensure that students perform to their capacity.

The Alachua County School District uses lawful and appropriate procedures to identify and place students in at-risk programs in a timely manner. The district also provides adequate support and training to both at-risk and regular education teachers and maintains a focus on parental involvement in programs. District officials analyze student needs and use data to evaluate and improve programs when staff believe reviews are needed, but not on a regularschedule.

The district places LEP students in a timely manner. The district's timeliness to assess and place LEP students far exceeds the state and peer district averages. The 2000-01 ESOL Annual Status Report shows that the assessment timeline in the Alachua County School District averaged 1.32 days, in contrast to the state's average of 8.43, and LEP students are released from the ESOL program after an average for 1.84 years compared the state average of 3.09 years. Since Alachua's LEP students scored higher than state and peer averages on academic indicators (FCAT Reading, Writing, and Math) and the ESOL student dropout rate is comparable to its peers and the state average, these efforts are clearly effective.

To assist at-risk students, the district provides core curriculum and alternative or support program teachers with varying amounts of professional development opportunities. Some programs, such as Title

I, have more funding and therefore more opportunities. As applicable, participants receive hourly stipends and in-service points. Regular classroom and at-risk teachers generally communicate using memos and notes although face-to-face meetings are also frequently held, a practice supported by district policy.

The district also focuses on parent involvement for at-risk students by setting conference days, offering parent training and volunteer opportunities, and soliciting feedback through periodic parent surveys. The district calendar includes two district-wide conference days in which parents are encouraged to meet with their child's teachers. The district also sends mid-term reports to the parents of all at-risk students, with even more frequent reporting at alternative education centers, such as Alachua Regional Marine Institute, which produces monthly progress reports. Programs also keep parents informed through newsletters, brochures, and parent libraries, some of which are available in students' native languages.

The district uses parent, student, and staff surveys, FCAT results, and state monitoring reports, such as the Quality Assurance Reviews for Alternative Education Programs, the DOE ESOL Status Report and the Title I Annual Evaluation Report and School-wide Accountability School Achievement Grade Distribution Report to analyze student needs.

The district's Title I and ESOL programs monitor student achievement and use this information to improve the program. For example, kindergarten teachers receive the results of the Early Screening Inventory test, which identifies incoming kindergartners needing additional reading instruction. During pre-planning activities, the Title I office also provides schools with standardized reading and math test scores for students scoring at or below the 35th percentile on the SAT9 or for those who score Level 1 on the FCAT. Schools use this information to provide additional reading groups or tutoring as needed. Student computer lab use reports are produced monthly and reviewed by teachers and the Title I Specialist to identify other issues or needs.

For dropout prevention, the district frequently reviews dropout rates and related data from DOE to compare district and state performance, in order to target efforts to reduce the percentage of students needing dropout prevention services. Individual schools also review ethnically grouped data to identify issues, discuss service delivery options, and add goals to SIPs if warranted. Due to these efforts, the district hired additional attendance officers and increased placement in alternative programs, such as through the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). In the 2002-03 school year the district also used this data to form the Attendance/Truancy Committee, which works with community groups to address students' issues, and held a Youth Summit to discuss dropout prevention issues with students, parents, and community members.

The district reviews graduation rates of dropout prevention students annually. To improve graduation rates, the district implemented competency-based programs, which allow students to make up needed credits. The district is also developing online courses to assist these students in meeting graduation requirements.

The district operates several alternative education programs, including school and center-based programs. These programs serve different types of students, meeting various student needs. Because of significant program differences, the district should review student progress and success for each program. However, until school year 2002-03, the district did not disaggregate data to review each program independently.

> **We recommend that the district disaggregate student data for its alternative education programs to evaluate student and program success and needs.**

Best Practice 4: Using

While the district provides an appropriate range of accelerated programs, the district could improve its efforts to meet the needs of students.

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 high school students and use this information to identify highly motivated and academically talented students and develop accelerated programs to meet their 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 Alachua County School District provides an appropriate range of accelerated programs. The district makes parents and students aware of accelerated program offerings and appropriately advises students and parents. The district attempts to offer equal access to accelerated programs for all students and the district generally evaluates the success of program instruction, for example, tracking the proportion of students who successfully pass AP exams. However, the district does not regularly compare the programs offered to the types of courses for which students are eligible, and despite efforts, there is a disproportionately low number of racial/ethnic minority students participating in these programs.

All district high schools offer Advanced Placement programs, although no two schools offer exactly the same number or types of courses. While smaller schools do not offer as many advanced courses, students can (and do) attend a different high school or enroll in the Florida Virtual School if a specific course is not offered at their home campus. All high schools also allow dual enrollment through Santa Fe Community College. The district disseminates information about accelerated program offerings through orientation meetings, open houses, brochures, a handbook for transitioning middle school students, and the district's website. The district relies on individual schools to select courses to offer. Generally, student requests determine course offerings, but some schools also consider student performance on qualifying tests (PSAT and PLAN) to ensure that offered classes address the needs of the greatest number of eligible students. However, the district does not compare the number of students who qualify for accelerated programs (based on PSAT and PLAN exam results) with the number who actually enroll, and does not evaluate schools' selection of offered accelerated programs.

> **We recommend that the district work with its schools to monitor eligibility for accelerated programs versus enrollment and course offerings at all appropriate schools, and make program adjustments as indicated.**

Although the district makes accelerated programs equally accessible to all students, there is a disproportionately low number of racial/ethnic minority students and low socio-economic status students participating in these programs. The district is using several strategies to address this issue.

- Student services, guidance counselors, school psychologists, and district personnel regularly meet to develop strategies that will improve minority participation.

- The district instituted the GEAR-UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) program three years ago. This program supports students at the middle and high school levels, focusing on (1) student academic performance, (2) student behavior / discipline, (3) student absenteeism, (4) parent participation, and (5) professional development for faculty and staff, to improve overall success.

> We recommend that the district evaluate the success of the initiatives such as GEAR-UP,
> designed to increase minority and low socio-economic status students' participation in
> accelerated programs for effectiveness and amend these strategies as needed.

Best Practice 5: Using

**Although the district provides effective workforce development programs, more
formalization of program evaluation and student data review is necessary.**

Workforce development programs are designed to provide training to meet local and state workforce
needs and to help Florida compete in a global economy by building a broadly based, highly skilled, more
productive workforce. The programs also provide a broad variety of services including literacy training,
English language skills, and/or attainment of high school diploma for adults who need these skills to enter
the labor market. Districts should have workforce development programs in place that meet the needs of
business and industry in their areas, including high skills/high wages occupations as well as occupations
that are in critical demand by the community. Districts should periodically assess workforce development
program offerings to ensure that needed programs and newly emerging occupations are addressed.
Districts should also provide adult basic education programs that reach all sectors of the population and
meet the needs of students at all literacy levels. To assess student success and improve programs, districts
should monitor changes in performance funding, student completion, and job placement.

The Alachua County School District coordinates its workforce development programs and services
among schools and centers, as well as with the regional Workforce Development Board. The
superintendent and the director of vocational programs serve on the Workforce Development Board's
Board of Directors. Further, program staff members sit on the *High Skills/High Wages* and the *First
Job/First Wages* committees, ensuring that district programs are fully coordinated with the Workforce
Development Board priorities. The district tracks completion rates for each program and uses the data to
determine the need for program adjustments.

The district has excellent collaborative programs that reflect community needs and involve a wide variety
of local businesses and enterprises. These collaborations afford students a vast array of opportunities
from field trips to shadowing experiences, dual enrollment, and internships. Habitually, industry
representatives sit on district advisory committees, and there is an advisory committee for each workforce
academy program. The committee representatives provide community feedback on programs and student
skills. While the district has not systematically solicited input from business and industry, postsecondary
educational institutions, or labor organizations, in 2002-03, the Gainesville Chamber of Commerce
initiated a local business survey to assess employer satisfaction with the skills of workforce development
program graduates and to assess whether the district's programs meet the community's workforce training
needs. These survey results could provide the district with additional information to adjust workforce
development program offerings as needed.

The district ensures efficient use of resources by eliminating poorly performing programs and programs
with low enrollments. Twice each year, the director of career, technical, and adult education examines
projected enrollment data to determine course offerings for the following academic year. Although
several programs have seen low enrollment, district personnel are rebuilding, rather than eliminating,
some programs. For example, outdated and poor equipment caused a decrease in the enrollment for the
Construction Academy program even though the need for qualified individuals in the area had not
decreased. Citing this need, the director of career, technical, and adult education obtained additional
funding to replace and repair the equipment and, as a result, the program's enrollment has increased.
Other workforce programs were eliminated in the years shown due to low enrollment or the elimination of
state funding: Agricultural Mechanics (1988), School Teacher Aide Training (1994), Lifelong
Learning/Parenting (1994), Child Care Aide Training (1997), Santa Fe Community College/Horticulture

(2001), ESE Landscape Maintenance (1999), Certified Nursing Assistant (2000), and several business education courses (1999).

At the beginning, middle and end of each year, district personnel review Department of Education's Regional Targeted Occupations List, which names critical demand for jobs for the region, and compares the list to the district's program offerings. Currently, the district offers programs for the following critical demand jobs: auto mechanic, bank teller, carpenter, computer programmer, computer support specialist, corrections officer and jailer, pre-dental assistant, pre-dental hygienist, pre-licensed practical nurse, machinist, typist and word processor, veterinary technician and technologist, as well as careers in sales, insurance, clerical, bookkeeping, and accounting.

While the district is using this practice, it could improve its program effectiveness in two ways. First, while district staff reviews a number of interim or output measures for the workforce development, standardizing the evaluation process to could improve programs and increase the recruitment and retention of students and ensure that students are properly served. The district reviews the following types of information:

- completion points accrued during the preceding year;

- retention of seniors from the previous junior class;

- number of seniors completing each program with a standard diploma;

- number of students in postsecondary education;

- number of students employed;

- number of students receiving advanced placement in a postsecondary program;

- number of ESE students served, number of ESE students receiving a standard or special diploma;

- number of students passing the FCAT; and

- and Florida Education & Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) data.

However, district personnel states that there has been a student retention problem for more than three years; but has not developed strategies to address this issue. In addition, the district does not systematically assess whether the offered workforce development programs reflect community needs. Creating a standard, regular, and systematic approach to evaluating workforce development programs would enable district officials to identify reasons for poor retention, as well as any other issues, such as poor enrollment in some areas, and offer direction toward improvement.

> **We recommend that the district standardize evaluation efforts for the workforce development programs to improve programs, increase the recruitment and retention of students, and ensure that programs meet community needs.**

Second, the district does not monitor whether students in the programs perform well on identified academic and non-academic indicators compared to peer and state averages, since it does not track this information. Reviewers performed a completion point comparison for the years 2000-01 and 2001-02 and found that the district increased its completion points by 10.48% for the Adult General Education programs, with ESOL Adult General Education from 1998-2001 showing a significant increase in completion points (669.75 points over the four-years). The number of students employed after graduation slightly increased from 1997-98 to 1999-2000, though decreased by 5% in 2000-01. Overall, these statistics indicate that the programs are generally effective; however, it would be to the district's benefit to standardize efforts to track and analyze workforce student's data to ensure that these trends continue.

> We recommend that the district establish relevant academic and non-academic indicators for workforce students and track these measures to ensure continued program effectiveness, develop an evaluation schedule to ensure that all workforce development programs are periodically evaluated, and adjust program efforts as needed.

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 effectiveness of the school improvement process, districts should provide training for school improvement teams that includes using academic and non-academic data to identify areas needing improvement, developing measurable objectives, and evaluating progress in meeting objectives. Districts also should oversee the school improvement planning process and provide additional assistance to schools that do not make adequate progress.

All schools in the Alachua County School District have an approved school improvement plan (SIP). SIPs include a needs assessment, goals, objectives, goals, and action plans that include interventions, links to the district strategic plan, lead responsibility, target dates, and a budget. In 2001-02, the district provided in-service training for principals, timelines for district monitoring, and technical assistance conferences and continued these efforts in 2002-03. Training included the use instructional data to develop SIPs and other school improvement planning and evaluation efforts. The district annually updates and distributes a School Improvement Guide, which includes specific planning guidelines, sample formats, and information on data analysis, and monitors schools' efforts to implementation efforts. In addition, the district requires each school to complete a mid-year review and report progress toward each goal, any goal modifications, and assistance needed. Title I schools must also submit a comprehensive plan detailing specific goals, objectives, technology plan, assistance plans, and budgetary allocations for this program. A district assistance team supports low-performing D and F schools, and monitors the efforts toward meeting measurable objectives. Low-performing schools and their leadership teams also have access to the Northeast Florida Education Consortium for technical assistance with data analysis. Santa Fe Community College trains these leadership teams to use FCAT SSS (Sunshine State Standard) and NRT (Norm Reference Test) test data, and provides guidance and assistance to the low-performing schools for a two-year period.

The district also requires schools to provide training for school staff, School Advisory Council (SAC) members, and other stakeholders on the role, duties, and responsibilities of members and provides information on state laws, relevant district policies, and the elements of a good SIP. District schools offer over 20 opportunities each year for training, but schools do not track attendance and cannot identify which SAC members have participated in training.

The district is not using this best practice because the objectives written into school improvement plans (SIPs) are not measurable. Except for schools that earned a D or F from the state's school grading program, the specific school objectives for academic achievement are often not measurable. For example, some objectives state "increase student performance in reading" (elementary school objective), "increase math proficiency of students at school" (middle school objective), and "develop and implement a multi-

year math program that will improve student performance in the Sunshine State Standards" (high school objective). Broadly written objectives do not help school personnel focus on the steps needed to improve student performance. The district should ensure that all SIPs include specific, measurable goals and objectives for improvement, such as "the percentage of third grade standard curriculum students who score below level 3 on the FCAT reading will decrease from 25% to 23%". Objectives written in this way allow teachers and administrators to focus specifically on those students who are presently scoring below level 3 and provide them the information needed to target resources that will improve performance. Moreover, it provides direction to administrators and teachers as they monitor and evaluate student performance to determine the change in the percentage of students scoring in level 3 from one year to the next. This would improve overall effectiveness of planning efforts, target resources, and will support school efforts to accurately evaluate their progress each year.

Action Plan 4-4

We recommend the district strengthen the evaluation and accountability component of the School Improvement Plans.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	The district should establish a mechanism to ensure that SIP goals are measurable, are based on school performance data, and that the goals and strategies match the school's needs, before being accepted and approved by the board.
	Step 2.	The district should provide technical assistance to any school with a SIP that does not include measurable goals, or whose strategies do not support goal attainment.
	Step 3.	The district should ensure that school staff and School Advisory Council members attend available training on developing SIPs for schools that repeatedly fail to submit comprehensive, measurable, and appropriate SIPs.
Who is Responsible	Deputy Superintendent for Curriculum Instruction and the Director of Curriculum Development and Implementation	
Time Frame	August 2004	

Best Practice 7: Using

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

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

The Alachua County School District has a pupil progression plan with a curriculum that aligns with Florida accountability measurements and the Sunshine State Standards. District officials regularly assess

level-to-level progress, while providing strategies to teachers and students for smooth transitions. Teachers frequently assess student progress and inform parents. Teachers share successful instructional strategies and teaching practices among colleagues within the district, which facilitates effective remedial assistance for poorly performing students.

The district's curricular framework aligns with Florida's accountability standards and with the Sunshine State Standards, and includes teaching strategies for meeting all instructional needs. The district provides leadership in the development of curriculum guides for all content areas. ESE teachers utilize regular education curriculum guides and materials where appropriate, supplemented with alternate instructional methods and materials that address the same skills and content areas. For manageability, district personnel follow the state's recommended textbook adoption cycle when revising guides.

The district effectively transitions students from one school level to the next and encourages feeder-pattern schools to work together to address identified issues. The district provides parent and student orientation meetings for transitioning grades. District staff members improve articulation across schools through the use of appropriate Academic Improvement Plans and developing feeder school patterns.

The district also gathers and assesses data on student progress from grade to grade or level to level. Most recently, the district gathered data for fourth and tenth grade students relative to promotion and graduation requirements. Data analysis revealed that FCAT scores needed improvement, so the district:

- implemented reading programs at all middle and high schools;
- reduced the number of students in each reading course;
- used previous FCAT scores and diagnostic instruments to identify students for reading courses; and,
- provided schools with data on students who did not passed the FCAT.

The school board approved the district's current student progression plan in November 2002. Consistent with Florida Statutes, the student progression plan directs each student's achievement at each level to be evaluated, and requires remediation for any student who does not meet specified performance levels. Academic Improvement Plans (AIPs) are required for elementary students whose performance is below grade level in reading, writing, math, or science. Secondary students who score at Level 1 on the FCAT, have a GPA of 2.5 or below, or who fail a course during the semester require an AIP. Intervention remediation (i.e.: tutorial support, extended day services, classroom accommodations) is specified in the AIP. The district tracks the number of promotions for "good cause" and uses the data to identify students who meet criteria for AIPs. However, as shown in Exhibit 4-6, the percentage of students receiving "good cause" promotions increases as grade levels increase. The district had not recognized this trend and could provide no explanation for it.

Exhibit 4-6
The Percentage of Students Receiving "Good Cause" Promotions Increases Across Grades

Grade Level	Number of Students	Percentage of Students With		
		"Good Cause" Promotions [1]	Regular Promotions [1]	Retention[1]
KG	1,948	2.57%	94.51%	2.93%
01	1,995	6.07%	90.53%	3.41%
02	2,009	8.21%	89.20%	2.59%
03	2,161	16.01%	81.26%	2.73%
04	2,190	17.31%	75.94%	6.76%
05	2,294	23.50%	75.20%	1.31%
06	2,366	25.02%	71.39%	3.59%
07	2,391	25.60%	71.35%	3.05%
08	2,267	24.13%	74.19%	1.68%
Total	**19,621**			

[1] DJJ facilities excluded.

Source: Alachua County School District, 2003 as of June 2002.

> **We recommend that the district assess "good cause" promotion data to determine why the percentage of students receiving these promotions increases by grade level and take steps to address the underlying causes. We also recommend the district track the percentage of remedial students who successfully move from one grade level to the next without "good cause" promotions and use the information to evaluate the success of Alachua's remedial programs.**

The district ensures that teachers regularly inform parents of student progress through mid-marking period reports. Students who do not make adequate progress receive AIPs and schools notify the parents of AIP conferences. Elementary schools regularly send a retention checklist home to inform parents of student progress. At the high school level, guidance counselors keep parents informed if students are not progressing toward gaining their high school credits. Additionally, the district sets two days for district-wide conferencing between teachers and parents to discuss student progress.

The district encourages and facilitates sharing innovative and effective teaching strategies among instructional personnel. Classroom teachers meet regularly with curriculum resource teachers to discuss educational practices and strategies, and to receive materials and in-service training. There is also a mentoring program for new teachers and a summer institute where teachers train other instructors in their specific areas of expertise.

Best Practice 8: Using

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

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

The Alachua County School District's educational programming organizational structure has reasonable lines of authority and spans of control to meet the needs of district teachers and students. Although the district compares teacher/student ratios, it does not review central office staffing levels or teacher/administrator or student/administrator levels to ensure that adequate supports are available.

The district's current organizational structure and staffing of educational programs minimize unnecessary administrative layers and processes and are in line with recommendations by the Florida Association of District School Superintendents. Although the district annually compares its staffing levels with state averages during the budget process, it does not compare staffing levels to peer districts   Peer comparisons would give the district information about a range of possible staffing practices or alternative organization structures that could meet district needs.

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 Alachua County School District selects instructional materials based on feedback from teachers and principals. Schools have the flexibility to purchase materials that meet specific needs, but must use at least 50% of their allocation to purchase materials from the state-approved list. Unneeded materials are properly disposed.

The district requires schools to report lost/damaged materials, and their value, four times a year. The district charges students 50-100% of the replacement cost, commensurate with the age and condition of the material. The money is collected and goes to the district's appropriation for instructional materials, and the district tracks both the amounts assessed and collected.

However, the district could improve by maximizing the collection of fees for lost and damaged instructional materials. The total reported cost of lost/damaged textbooks for 2001-02 was $78,161 with $21,947 or approximately 28% of these fees collected. The district could recoup an additional $100,318 over the next five years with improved collection for lost/damaged textbooks, as illustrated in Exhibit 4-7 below. The cost savings estimate assumes that the district will incrementally increase its collection rate to 75% (of the amount charged to students) over the five-year period.

Exhibit 4-7
Estimated Cost Savings From Maximizing
Collection Efforts for Lost and Damaged Materials

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Cumulative Total
Estimated Cost of Lost/Damaged Textbooks [1]	$78,161	$78,161	$78,161	$78,161	$78,161	$78,161	
Yearly Goals for Improved Collection Rate	28% [3]	33%	43%	54%	64%	75%	
Estimated Collections with Improved Rate Goals	$21,947	$25,793	$33,609	$42,207	$50,023	$58,621	
Potential Cost Savings with New Collection Rates [2]	0	$3,846	$11,662	$20,260	$28,076	$36,674	$100,318

[1] Total depreciated costs are for lost and damaged books reported by the district for 2001-02. There are no calculated increases in estimated costs since these would be based on anticipated enrollment growth and in this district student enrollment is expected to slightly decline

[2] Based on estimated additional collections using collection rate goals minus collections at the 2002 rate.

[3] Actual collection rate was 28.08%, which yields the collected amount of $21,947 from $78,161 in costs.

Source: Calculations made by ValienteHernandez P.A. with assistance from district staff, April 2003.

> **We recommend that the district maximize collection efforts for lost and damaged instructional materials.**

Best Practice 10: Using

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

To use 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.

Media centers in the Alachua County School District have sufficient resources to support instruction. District officials regularly take steps to reduce costs and maximize media center-related spending. All media centers are fully automated, offer age-appropriate databases and research tools for students, and media specialists report there are sufficient hours of operation for students and teachers. The district attempts to ensure that media center materials and equipment are up-to-date.

The district allocates funds to each school to purchase materials that support instruction. Each school also meets the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) standard for book volume. However, actual school expenditures for media resources for 2000-01 and 2001-02 varied considerably across schools. Each principal has the discretion to use the district allocation to purchase materials for various school needs, and the district does not require a minimum percentage expenditure for media support. Therefore, over the past few years, some school media programs received significant funding and others had few new resources added. The district assists school media staff by assessing the quality and cost for large purchases and by using bulk bid pricing when feasible. Schools, however, are responsible for the majority of purchasing with the district having final approval.

School media specialists annually provide the district with a complete budget statement reflecting all funds, including grants, special state monies, and book fair monies used to support the center. Schools can independently apply for small or specialized grants, while the Media Services Department assists with large grants. The district allocates any special state monies on a per-student basis for particular items (such as audio-visual materials and books), and retains a percentage to support electronic databases and other student resources for all schools.

Media specialists "weed" their collections every year to remove and replace obsolete, out-of-date, or inappropriate materials. According to the media supervisor, the district has a data system that can average the age of each school's collection; however, the data is not completely accurate. In the past, the district did not standardize the information entered into the software, so data may represent the date the book was added to the media center or the copyright date, rather than the actual age of the material. Within the last two years, the district standardized this process so as older materials are weeded from the collection the "age data" for materials will become more accurate.

The district could improve its evaluation of library and media center adequacy by assessing stakeholder satisfaction with resources and hours of operation. Currently, because school administrators can select the questions to use in the annual needs assessment, the surveys differ from school to school and no district-wide data on teacher or principal satisfaction with media center materials is available. Surveying stakeholders, such as teachers and principals, on their satisfaction with the hours of operation and resources of media centers would help to ensure that the district is providing adequate library and media services to meet student needs.

> **We recommend that the district encourage all schools to assess satisfaction with media services as part of the annual needs assessment.**

Best Practice 11: Not Using

Although students have some opportunity to use technology, the district should make additional efforts to include technology in instruction.

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

The Alachua County School District provides teachers with recommended lists of instructional courseware that align with the Sunshine State Standards and district grade-level benchmarks. The district ratio of students to computers is 4:1.

However, the district is not using this best practice standard because it lacks standards for using technology, does not track usage, and therefore cannot ensure that technology is adequately used to support instruction. The district expects teachers and students to use computers for communication, academic research, and instructional assistance, and principals believe students have adequate opportunities to use computers and other technology in the classroom. Currently, the district only tracks student computer usage for Title I eligible students (only elementary in Alachua). Title I recommends that each student be given 30 minutes of computer time two to three times per week, depending upon the students' needs. However, a survey of teachers conducted for this review showed that 29.6% of teacher respondents give their students "less than one time per week" to use computers. If district officials encouraged schools to use technology by setting goals and standards for each school, as well as by monitoring student usage of instructional technology, they would be able to evaluate whether students are given adequate time using the computers.

Action Plan 4-5

We recommend that the district develop guidelines for using technology for instructional purposes, including the amount of time students should use instructional technology.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Create and distribute guidelines based on available educational recommendations. The guidelines should detail how often teachers should use technology as an instructional tool.
	Step 2.	Create and distribute guidelines, based on available educational recommendations, detailing the time per week students at different levels should use technology for educational purposes.
	Step 3.	Track teacher and student usage to determine adherence to guidelines.
Who Is Responsible	Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Best Practice 12: Using

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

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

assesses its support services plan and uses this information to make adjustments as needed to help resolve barriers to student learning.

The Alachua County School District's plan for providing student support services is based on an analysis of student needs, and the district regularly evaluates the effectiveness of its service delivery. The district also regularly compares student support staffing levels and expenditures to comparable districts to ensure efficient use of resources.

Student Support Services staff develops an annual plan to provide student support services throughout the district. The plan addresses annual department goals and links to the strategic plan. The plan is comprehensive and includes all district student services, however, it does not include measurable objectives for each goal. District staff should ensure that future plan amendments include measurable objectives for each goal. Each school within the district also has its own student services plan as part of the SIP, which is an exemplary practice since most other Florida school districts only have a district-wide plan.

The Student Support Services district staff regularly review a variety of data to identify patterns of performance or emerging concerns and to evaluate the success of its programs in order to make changes. Data reviews occur monthly, quarterly, or annually, depending upon the type of information assessed, and identified issues are incorporated into the annual plan and monitored regularly. Each school-based team completes the student services program review. The review covers guidance and counseling, health services, psychological services, and general student services and the results are compiled at the district level. A 2001-02 review resulted in a district goal to increase communication with parents. Thus, the district is developing a parent survey for student support service delivery and needs, and expects to distribute this survey in the Fall of 2003.

The Student Services division places a nurse in every school, paid for by the county health department. Whereas most districts rely on a limited number of nurses who are shared by all schools within a district, in Alachua, Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) and Registered Nurses (RNs) are allocated to schools based on students' needs and a nurse is also employed at the district level.

The district regularly compares student support staffing levels and expenditures to comparable districts and the state to ensure efficient use of resources. In reviewing the 2001-02 school board human resources allocation, a comparison of student support staffing levels shows the district meets the Southern Association of College and Schools (SACS) standards. Exhibit 4-8 illustrates the staffing comparisons of Alachua's peers. It should be noted that while Alachua reports a better ratio of social workers to students than all peers, the social work function is completed by home-school liaisons and other district staff, not by licensed social workers. The comparisons of guidance counselors and school psychologists indicate that the district's staffing is comparable with its peers.

Exhibit 4-8
Peer Comparison of Support Services Staff and Students, 2001-02

	Alachua	Bay	Collier	Lake	Marion	St. Lucie
Number of Staff Guidance Counselors	76	68	119	76	78	81
Ratio GC:students	1:390	1:374	1:303	1:396	1:493	1:371
Number of Staff Social Workers Ratio SW:students	17	5	7	9	18	8
	1:1745	1:5081	1:5144	1:3347	1:2136	1:3759
Number of Staff Psychologists Ratio: P:students	19	13	20	13	18	10
	1:1561	1:1954	1:1801	1:2318	1:2136	1:3007
Student membership	29,662	25,407	36,010	30,127	38,456	30,070

Source: FDOE, Education Information and Accountability Services, Staff in Florida's Public Schools, 2001.

5 Administrative and Instructional Technology

Summary

The Alachua County School District is using 4 of the 9 administrative and instructional technology best practices. The district has cost effectively purchased new technology, maintains a dependable technology infrastructure given available resources, have established policies and ethical standards for using technology, and has good controls to ensure proper access and use of the district's information systems. To use the remaining best practice standards and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its technology program, the district should regularly update and monitor its technology plan, formalize the training processes related to technology, adjust budget allocations within available funding, use the work order system to improve the delivery of support services, expand the use of technology to improve district communications, and establish procedures for analyzing technology purchases and services.

Background

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

In 2001, the district's two technology departments were combined into one comprehensive department, the Administrative and Instructional Technology Department. The merger took place when the directors realized that both departments had overlapping duties and consolidation into one department would increase overall efficiency.

The department's mission statement is "to promote the effective use of technology to implement the Sunshine State Standards to improve performance of all students." The department's main goal is "to provide technological tools to enable teachers to give students an optimum learning experience, to enable students to take maximum advantage of the educational process, to enable administrators and staff to support the educational process and fulfill accountability and reporting requirements." Its vision is "for a school / home / community network of communications where each partner communicating with others contributes to the overall education of our children." The department provides leadership in selecting technology, facilitates its implementation and integration into the learning environment, trains personnel, and supports the use of technology through problem resolution and repair.

The Administrative and Instructional Technology Department of the Alachua County School District serves approximately 30,000 students in 45 schools and centers across the district as well as more than 4,000 employees. The district has over 7,000 computers and 72 local area networks, with all schools,

centers, and administrative buildings connected to the Internet via a Token Ring networking plan. Also, during the 2002-03 school year, the networks at 33 schools are being converted to Ethernet using Qualified Zone Academy Bond (QZAB) funding, explained in Best Practice 2. [1] The school board has a World Wide Web site at http://www.sbac.edu/. As of 2000-01, Alachua County had the fewest number of computers compared to its peers (Exhibit 5-1).

Exhibit 5-1
In 2000-01, Alachua County Had Fewer Computers Than Its Peers

Alachua	Bay	Collier	Lake	Marion	St. Lucie
7,308	9,386	12,393	8,976	10,442	9,295

Source: Florida Department of Education, Education Technology, 2001.

According the district's *2001-06 District Technology Plan*: "Schools currently use computers for instruction in three general areas: technology literacy, curriculum support, and communication. All schools have technology/computer committees that provide direction for the application of technology in the instructional process and the purchase of hardware/software. Each school committee selects and purchases its own computer software according to curriculum objectives and needs. The district sets general direction and provides oversight to assure the quality and compatibility of the instructional materials."

For the 2002-03 school year, district allocation for technology from state funds totaled $696,161 or less than 1% of the total district budget, which is comparable with its peers. This amount excludes grants and other local funding secured by the district.

The Technology and Information Services Department oversees technology in Alachua County schools, including the mainframe and support of the student services, human resources, finance, and facilities functions. Within that structure, the Administrative and Instructional Technology Department addresses all issues related to both administrative and instructional technology, as well as the local area networks at each school and center. The staff also supports other areas of technology at schools and centers, and assists the teachers in using technology in their curriculum. The organizational structure of these departments is shown in Exhibits 5-2 and 5-3.

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[1] Qualified Zone Academy Bonds are a federally-funded program designed to allow school district to finance capital projects with interest-free bonding. The equivalent of interest on the bonds is paid by the Internal Revenue Service as a direct deduction of the entity's taxes due. Schools with at least 35% free or reduced lunch status students and a 10% match of requested funds from their business partners could qualify to apply for the right to sell the bonds.

Exhibit 5-2
Technology and Information Services Department's Organizational Structure
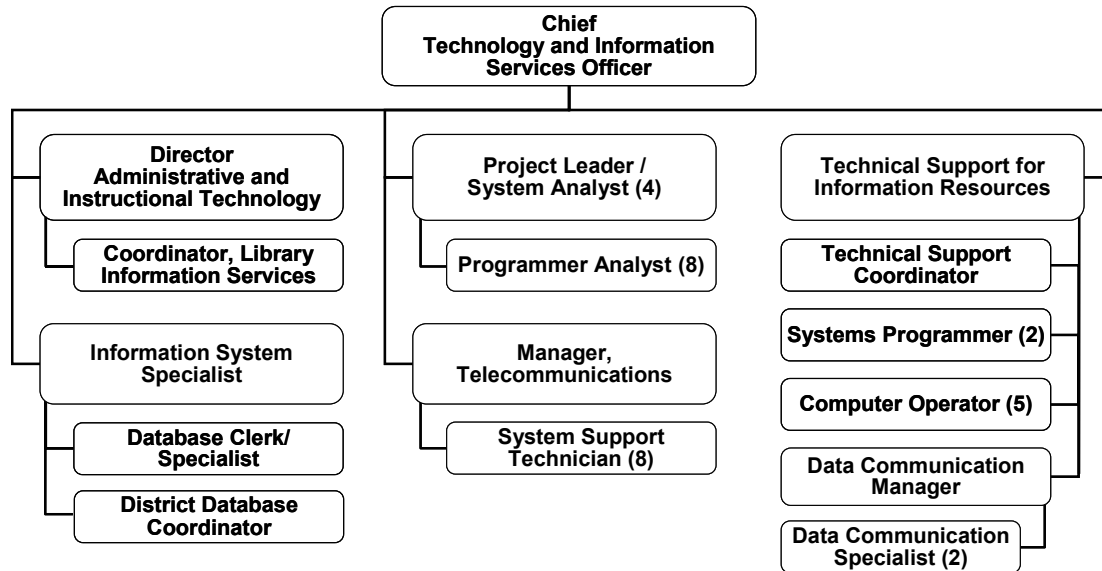
Source: Alachua County School District, 2003.

Exhibit 5-3
Administrative and Instructional Technology
Department's Organizational Structure
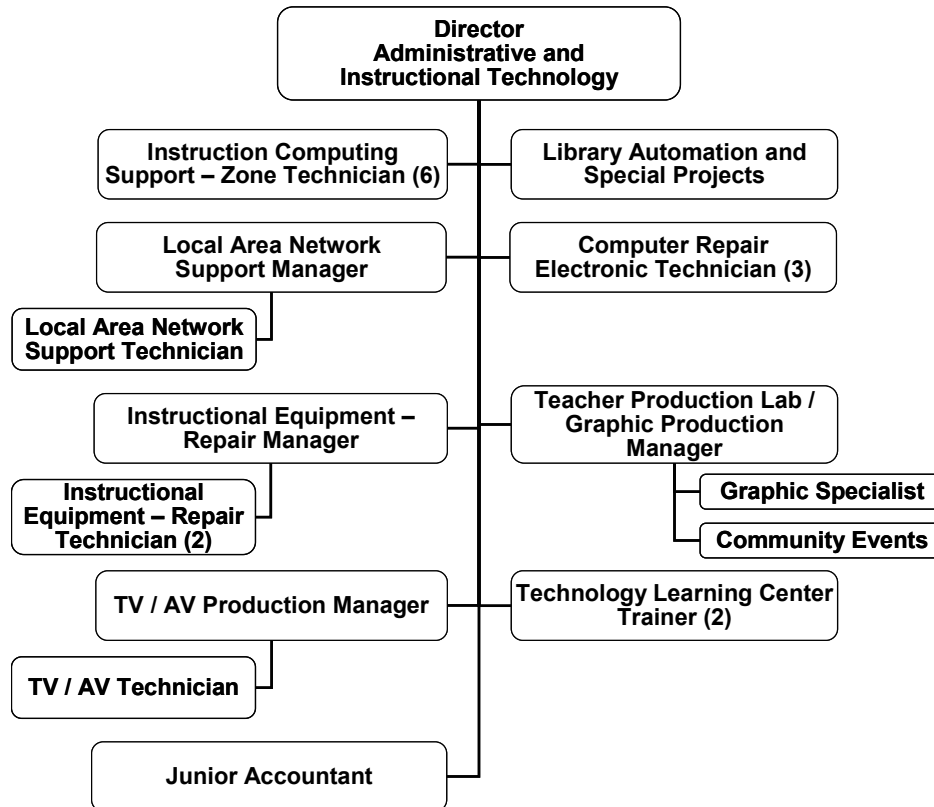
Source: Alachua County School District, 2003.

Activities of particular interest

- The Alachua County School District has the nation's first mobile technology lab that allows students to study core academic subjects through the use of some of the most advanced technology available. This unit is housed in a 12' X 65' highway trailer and is moved from school to school to demonstrate the latest in computer and display technology. It is used as a portable classroom with 12 networked multimedia computer stations that are connected to the Internet.

- In seeking Qualified Zone Academy Bond (QZAB) funds from the federal government, the district was required to raise a "matching donation" of $514,710. The actual pledge from local businesses and community members was over $1.3 million in 2001.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Conclusions for Administrative and Instructional Technology Best Practices

Practice Area		Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
Technology Planning	1.	The district has a comprehensive technology plan that provides direction for administrative and instructional technology decision making.	No	5-6
Cost-Effective Technology Acquisition	2.	The district acquires technology in a cost-effective manner that will best meet its instructional and administrative needs.	Yes	5-8
Technology Professional Development	3.	District and school-based staff receive professional development training for all technologies used in the district.	No	5-10
Technical Support	4.	The district provides timely and cost-effective technical support that enables educators and district staff to successfully implement technology in the workplace.	No	5-12
Infrastructure and Network Communication	5.	The district maintains a dependable, standards-based infrastructure employing strategies that cost-effectively maximize network and Internet access and performance.	Yes	5-14
	6.	The district uses technology to improve communication.	No	5-15
	7.	The district has written policies that apply safe, ethical, and appropriate use practices that comply with legal and professional standards.	Yes	5-15
Information Management and Delivery	8.	The district has established general controls in the areas of access, systems development and maintenance, documentation, operations, and physical security to promote the proper functioning of the information systems department.	Yes	5-16
	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.	No	5-17

TECHNOLOGY PLANNING

Best Practice 1: Not Using

The district's technology plan does not provide adequate 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 also 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 Alachua County School District's technology plan covers years 2001-06. It was approved by the Department of Education and the school board and includes information on individual school needs, equitable resource allocation, technology funding, cost-effective acquisitions, technology-related professional development, support needs, infrastructure and networking issues, and information management and delivery. However, the district's does not use this best practice because the plan is not comprehensive, is not based on a valid needs assessment, and is not evaluated and updated in a scheduled manner. The district should ensure that the goals listed in the plan are specific, measurable, attainable, reasonable, and time-bounded. The district also should ensure that the plan is monitored and updated based on valid data related to the district's technology needs, skills, usage, and fluency levels among district employees.

Six strategies in the district's strategic plan relate to technology and are considered the goals for the technology plan. However, several are not SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Reasonable, and Time-bounded) goals. In the district technology plan, the objectives are ambiguous (e.g.: ensure, transform, create, etc.). Few of the goals are measurable and are not based on specific standards, making it difficult to document whether the goal was obtained. In addition, there are several goals in the district's strategic plan which should be reviewed from a technological perspective. For example, strategy 6, goal 10 is:

> *"We will acquire and allocate resources to guarantee equal opportunity for all students; Replace 20% of computers and associated peripherals to assure that no computer is more than five-years-old, beginning with the schools/centers farthest from the criterion."*

Given funding constraints, the 20% replacement policy detailed in this strategy is not attainable nor is it appropriately time-bounded. In 1999, an external audit of the district's electronic data processing functions revealed that over 50% of the district's computers were "technologically obsolete." The estimated cost to bring the technology current was nearly $5.2 million, which would require more than 10 years' budgets given the annual district technology allocation of approximately $696,000. Also, over the last five years, district funding decreased following annual cuts in the state technology categorical

funding allocations, resulting in a total decrease of approximately 6.6%. Given budget constraints, a more appropriate strategy might be:

> *"Replace instructionally-used computers and associated peripherals to ensure that no computer in a school is more than five years-old, beginning with the schools farthest from the criterion. All instructionally-used computers will meet these criteria by June 2006. Replace administratively-used computers (in schools and centers) and associated peripherals to ensure that no computer is more than five years-old, beginning with administrative areas (in schools and centers) that are farthest from the criterion. All administratively-used computers will meet these criteria by June 2006."*

In addition, proper plan monitoring requires a regular review and assessment of goals. In Alachua, the director of Administrative and Instructional Technology collects suggested changes from management information system (MIS) staff, chief technology and information services officer, zone technicians, school-based support personnel, administrators, and others. However, the plan is only updated every two to five years or in response to a grant application or Department of Education requirement, and goal attainment is not monitored.

Action Plan 5-1

We recommend the district review its strategic and technology plan to ensure that all district technology goals are included in the technology plan, that these goals meet SMART criteria (specific, measurable, attainable, reasonable and time-bounded), and that the plan implementation is annually monitored and updated.	
Action Needed	Step 1. Review strategies and goals in the district strategic plan.
	Step 2. Identify all strategies and goals for utilizing technology, including technology goals for district support, instructional support and operational support needs.
	Step 3. Include all technology-related strategies and goals in the District Technology Plan, ensuring that all are specific, measurable, attainable, reasonable, and time-bounded.
	Step 4. Collect the information on progress toward meeting goals.
	Step 5. At least every two years, evaluate progress on existing plan and adjust goals based in part on input from stakeholders on technology needs, availability of resources, and training needs.
	Step 6. Report results to district management and to the board.
Who Is Responsible	Chief Technology and Information Services Officer, Director, Administrative and Instructional Technology, School Board
Time Frame	June 2004

Accurately assessing district personnel's technology needs, skills, usage, and fluency is an important part of the technology plan monitoring process. In Alachua instructional and administrative personnel are surveyed annually using the Department of Education Technology Resources Survey (DOE TRS), to catalogue each school's technology inventory. Personnel are also surveyed using the district's general Needs Assessment Survey (NAS), which includes a section on technology. Although the district uses these two assessments, the data is not complete. For example, the DOE TRS only describes the technology schools have, but not what is needed. In addition, the NAS describes self-reported technology awareness and needed training, but lacks objective assessment of actual proficiency and training needs.

> **We recommend that the district improve efforts to plan for staffs' technology training needs by amending the Needs Assessment Survey that gauge user needs, skills and satisfaction. See Best Practice 3, Action Plan 5-2 for the steps needed to implement this recommendation.**

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 Alachua County School District has a district-level ranking system to prioritize technology acquisition, which was formalized in 2002. Through school-based management, schools have the flexibility to purchase items based on identified needs, while bulk-buying and vendor purchasing agreements supply some basic needs of schools and centers in the district. Limited opportunities to preview and evaluate technology items such as new software are provided to district personnel. Technology resources are not equitably distributed throughout the district, since Qualified Zone Academy Bond (QZAB) provided funding for 33 of the district's 45 schools and centers, while budget allocations were not sufficient to provide equally for the others.

Although the district is using this best practice, there are two areas in which it could improve: use research and evaluation to guide decision-making and consider future support, operating, maintenance, and disposal costs when acquiring technology.

The district uses a qualitative system to identify its administrative and instructional technology needs. Each school's technology committee ranks its needs. Then all school lists are compiled at the district and re-ranked. The most antiquated equipment is identified for replacement first. Other needs are considered in light of technology staff's discussions regarding past purchasing decisions. However, when considering new purchase requests, the district does not objectively review its experience with similar previous purchases to determine whether they met district needs, or that staff received the needed training to effectively use the new resources. Without this additional feedback, future purchasing decisions will not ensure that district technology needs are met.

> **We recommend that the district create and institute a policy to document the evaluation of previous major technology initiatives (e.g.: payroll processing software), including purchase, implementation, training, usage, etc., and use the information to make informed purchasing decisions in the future.**

The chief information and technology officer's primary responsibility is to set overall standards for the support of administrative and instructional technology. Current standards include the objectives in the strategic plan, the technology plan, and individual school improvement plans (SIPs). According to district personnel, "the technology plan has served as the de facto standards and procedures manual for many years, and although there are many checklists and help sheets that detail processes, these need to be compiled into one manual." Standardization can reduce the total cost of purchased technology by reducing the time needed to implement and support the technology and train district personnel.

Because of limited funding allocations, there is no specific budget for technology planning, so new projects and update purchases are not necessarily acquired based on need or a plan. According to district officials, these items are worked into the budget if their priority is high enough. Cost and need are the primary factors that affect purchases in the district. With limited funds, the district chooses projects based on necessity and will go the extra step in finding the most cost-beneficial item. If unexpected necessary

expenses arise, personnel re-prioritize the current expenditure plan to fit the new need. The annual budget for all district technology costs (except those addressed by QZAB or other specific funding options) is shown in Exhibit 5-4 below.

Exhibit 5-4
SBAC Annual Technology Budget 2002-03

Instructional Technology Incentive Grants to Schools	$306,161
Additional Uses of Technology Funds:	
Support Personnel	280,000
School-based Supplements	60,000
Contingency	50,000
Total Technology Allocation	**$696,161**

Source: Alachua County School District, 2003

After the 1999 audit showed that over 50% of the district's computers were "technologically obsolete," district officials began to seek alternative funding. In September 2000, the district learned of Qualified Zone Academy Bonds, or QZAB funding. During October 2000, the 33 schools eligible for these funds (at least 35% free/reduced lunch status students) worked to solicit the required 10% matching funds. The total district required match amount was $514,710, and the actual pledge from community members was over $1.3 million. In November, the school board approved submission of the project to the Florida Department of Education, Facilities Division, which is responsible for awarding the grants in Florida. The district began issuing bonds by March 2001, with QZAB implementation finished in 2002-03. District officials estimate that now only about 17% of the district's technology is obsolete.

QZAB funding allowed the district to update computers in the targeted 33 schools, which excludes 12 of the district's schools and centers and all of the administrative buildings. The superintendent is actively searching for funding for the non-QZAB school sites. The estimated amounts for necessary equipment upgrades in the other sites are approximately $350,000 for high schools, $300,000 for middle schools, and $250,000 or elementary schools. This total of $900,000 does not include the costs of time for installation and personnel training nor the costs of current and future support needs. To increase available resources for the 2002-03 school year, a share of the Technology Categorical Funds of more than twice the normal FTE-based calculation has been allocated to non-QZAB schools to fund replacement some older equipment, however, these additional funds will not meet all needs.

There is little documentation on whether the district routinely considers future support, operating, maintenance, and disposal costs when acquiring technology. With QZAB, district personnel contacted national vendors with proven records of service and support to minimize unnecessary future expenses, reduce potential long-term costs, and allow the district to best allocate its time and funding. With general technology resources, however, operations and maintenance costs are an issue. There is also no documentation to suggest that the district has considered funding sources for maintenance and repair for new technology. Typically, funds for this come from individual schools' technology budgets; however, these limited funds are usually earmarked for training and supplies. In addition, according to the chief technology officer, schools do not want to pay for support and maintenance out of their budgets, but the district's centralized budget only funds parts. It is unclear how the district will address training and maintenance issues without a possible restructuring of the technology allocation.

> **We recommend that the district consider structuring budget allocations to include future training and district-wide support needs. Additionally, each school budget should include allocations for future technology maintenance and support.**

TECHNOLOGY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Best Practice 3: Not Using

District and school-based staff receive limited 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 Alachua County School District conducts a basic needs assessment of district staff to assist with training planning and offers limited training opportunities, which are voluntary. District technology training is organized through the Personnel Services Department with guidance from Administrative and Instructional Technology Department staff. Training is also available through the Technology Learning Center (TLC), a centralized training center offering technology classes to all district employees. As discussed Best Practice 2, the district does not specifically budget for technology training, and there are no training standards. In addition, while each school must provide technology training opportunities, little of schools' overall training budget is spent on technology training.

The district could improve efforts to select training offerings and should use established industry standards to define performance criteria. The district's technology training for instructional, career service and administrative personnel is developed using a qualitative Needs Assessment Survey (NAS) to solicit input on training for district employees. As previously noted the scope of the NAS is narrow and does not identify all training needs or satisfaction with district training efforts. The district should amend the NAS to ensure that all software and instructional technology training needs are identified.

The district plans to use the International Society of Technology in Education (ISTE) National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) to identify technology performance criteria and skills for instructional personnel, administrators, and students. The district plans to incorporate these standards into technology usage requirements for personnel and students in the near future. However, at this time, most district training is not based on any specific standards. Uses these standards would focus the technology training efforts for students and personnel.

Action Plan 5-2

We recommend the district revise the current needs assessment to provide additional data regarding software use and support training needs.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Revise current needs assessment to more appropriately gauge user needs, skills, and satisfaction with resources and professional development.
	Step 2.	Incorporate the use of NETS into the assessment process
	Step 3.	Assess all district personnel every other year.
	Step 4.	Incorporate data as goals and standards into following year's technology plan for training.
Who Is Responsible	Chief Technology and Information Services Officer, Director of Administrative and Instructional Technology, Director of Personnel	
Time Frame	December 2003 and ongoing	

District technology training is primarily offered through the Technology Learning Center (TLC). Without a training budget, the TLC is nevertheless directed to train all district employees, regardless of level of expertise. As a result, the majority of the training addresses basic needs. The district provides other limited opportunities for technology training at school sites, to meet the needs of instructional personnel. Most training is offered after school and during the summer, requiring staff to use personal time. Training generally uses a classroom-style format, and there are a few opportunities for on-line training, and more is needed. Our survey showed that 64.8% of teachers reported that technology training is offered in a variety of ways. However, only 58.3% of teachers reported that district-wide technology training is adequate.

The TLC trains district employees on software applications and other technology items. Two full-time trainers conduct workshops each semester and have created tutorial packages for various software applications. However, these trainers are primarily responsible for all learning center operations, which include: secretarial tasks, writing and printing manuals, maintaining TLC operating systems, assisting zone technicians with repair and help-desk services, analyzing and customizing software, and assisting with the Food Services Department's technology needs, leaving little time for staff training. Nevertheless, for calendar year 2002, TLC trained 867 district employees through 103 technology-related workshops, of which 28 were at school sites. Advanced software training and support for using technology in the classroom are topics that have not been addressed because of limited resources. TLC staff report they have only offered three student-training sessions in five years. Utilizing a revised needs assessment instrument to collect data on specific training needs would provide TLC trainers and district staff with a more accurate picture of what training should be offered, and would help the TLC target its limited resources. For example, in the 2001-02 school year there were 147 work orders that requested zone technicians to assist with items that were essentially "training issues." Also, 442 requests for assistance with email and 133 requests for assistance with the accounting software were logged as staff needed assistance with both system errors (e.g.: crashing, log-in/out issues, etc.) and training reminders.

In addition to the technology training limitations for general staff, training for the district's technology support personnel is inadequate. Over the last four years, the majority of the district's technology support personnel have only received specialized training for Microsoft Windows XP certification when the district changed to that platform. They have not received continuing training to support the accounting and other specialty software used to support district operations. Continued training for technicians is needed to ensure they are knowledgeable with current industry practices to improve their ability to provide support.

Action Plan 5-3

We recommend the district revise the technology training process.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Using an updated needs assessment determine all classes of employees and technology support personnel's training needs.
	Step 2.	Review training schedules to maximize the number of staff who can attend.
	Step 3.	Select subgroups of district support technology staff to be certified to provide support of the various district operational systems.
	Step 4.	Using all data provided, coordinate training offerings with Personnel Services Department, ensuring that all training needs are met and no overlap occurs.
Who Is Responsible	Chief Technology and Information Services Officer, and Director of Personnel	
Time Frame	December 2003 and on-going	

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Best Practice 4: Not Using

The district does not provide adequate technical support for successful implementation of technology in the workplace.

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.

In 2002-03, the Alachua County School District reorganized its technology support into six zones, each with one technician, to improve response time and service. Zone technicians are responsible for all technology issues within their identified geographic area, reducing travel time and improving service response times. The six zone technicians cover the district's schools and centers, as well as the administrative offices, servicing over 7,000 computers and 72 local area networks for a ratio of 1 technician for each 1300+ computers and 12 networks. As of May 2003, the department has 12 technician vacancies so these responsibilities are assigned to a zone technician or a "floating technician" position. The department has faced both a hiring freeze and difficulty in recruiting staff.

A help-desk was created when the two departments, Instructional and Administrative, merged. This eliminated unnecessary travel time and work for zone technicians. According to the chief technology and information services officer, the help-desk has reduced unnecessary site visits by approximately 50% and has improved the timeliness of support. The help-desk tracks all "tickets" or technology support work orders.

To expand the reach of the district's limited technology support efforts, the district offers school-based supplements. A formal part of the technology budget, school-based supplements pay stipends to instructional personnel willing to serve as site-based technical specialists, supporting site-based needs and training. Funds are limited to $932 per year per school. While a notable creative strategy, there is evidence that this effort is not working. School-based tech support personnel are starting to refuse the position and stipend, claiming the pay does not compensate for the required time and workload demands. This, in turn, has increased the district support personnel's workload as well as the training workload on the Technology Learning Center staff. In addition, comments provided at the teacher and principal focus groups indicated that while district-based personnel provide quality service, most school-based personnel do not have the skills needed to fulfill this job responsibility.

> **We recommend that the district review its use of stipend funds for technology support and determine whether these funds should be used in an alternative manner, as discussed in Action Plan 5-4 below.**

In general, the Alachua County School District partially assesses technical support needs, prioritizes needs to ensure timely technical support, and has a budget in place for technology. However, the district is not using this best practice because it does not regularly assess support needs, does not systematically

share identified support solutions among staff, does not formally review or evaluate services provided, and does not budget for all costs within the district.

According to Help Desk statistics, in the 2002-03 school year, tech support personnel took an average of 15.4 days to complete a work order ticket. However, this figure may not be accurate, since there is no standard protocol for entering work order dates into the system. For example, some jobs are entered the day they are completed, while other usually larger jobs, are entered when the work order comes through, which can be several weeks before the job is actually completed. In addition, the way work order jobs are entered are not categorized based on the type of work needed (e.g.: installation, repair, etc.). Adding standard work order dates and categories would improve the department's ability to analyze its workload and adjust its efforts accordingly. This is especially important given the limited available staffing.

With the lack of support personnel, the help-desk technician must prioritize assignments carefully to ensure maximum efficiency. According to district personnel, the first priority is to repair any breakdown that prevents staff from completing day-to-day operations. The second priority is based on the number of people affected by the problem. With its limited staffing, district personnel report that they operate in a culture of "management by crisis." The director of Administrative and Instructional Technology notes that further prioritizing efforts are almost moot since current personnel can only respond to emergencies rather than preventive maintenance or new projects. This situation will remain until the district's financial resources are eased and additional personnel can be hired.

Although technology service delivery is coordinated by the help-desk and the help-desk software can research past problems and the actions taken to resolve problems, this information is not shared among tech support personnel. The system is not easy to use, and technicians and help desk personnel are not required to research or review prior service records. Sharing problems and resolutions would assist in troubleshooting new assignments. One way to facilitate sharing this information is to include this information as an agenda item in monthly staff meetings. However, first staff must enter job completion information in a consistent manner, which will require some initial training for technicians.

Action Plan 5-4

We recommend the district train staff to use the work order system in a consistent manner and share information on past projects to help facilitate resolution of new problems.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Use staff meeting time to train technology staff on standard data entry practices for the technology work order system. This should include standardization of dates, work order categories, and resolutions
	Step 2.	Identify the individuals responsible for preparing monthly reports that will be shared and discussed at each meeting.
	Step 3.	Use this information to improve technology support staff's knowledge for responding to recurrent problems, to identify additional training needs, and to ensure that any future personnel additions recruit staff with specifically needed skills.
	Step 4.	Develop strategies to strengthen the technology support system. These could include: alternative uses for stipend funds, of approximately $60,000 for filling vacancies and using students or other volunteers to provide software or other appropriate support, ensuring these individuals do not have access to confidential information.
Who Is Responsible	Chief Technology and Information Services Officer	
Time Frame	June 2004	

INFRASTRUCTURE AND NETWORK COMMUNICATION

Best Practice 5: Using

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

A district's success in meeting the demands for information depends largely on the ability of its infrastructure to receive and transmit data for effective communication and resource sharing. Thus, districts should have a district-wide infrastructure that provides communication, data transmission, resource sharing, and Internet capabilities in a cost-effective manner. The district's network should be fully operational and consistently available to users. To help ensure network dependability, the district 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 Alachua County School District maintains a consistently available and operational network that features security measures such as firewalls and virus protection software, although it could make some improvements in the enforcement of its anti-virus software policy and by developing written speed and access standards.

The school board operates a county-wide metropolitan area network (MAN) of ISDN, frame relay, T1 point-to-point, and 10MBPS digital circuits connecting token-ring local-area networks (LANs) at all school sites and administrative locations to the district central office. For technical support with the network, internet access, or other issues, the help desk is manned from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, with phone assistance through on-call technicians available 24 hours a day, five days per week. For security, the district has a firewall to protect all computers from viruses. Also, virus protection is installed on all new and existing workstations, and virus updates are downloaded from the internet to keep software current.

However, a June 2003 financial audit found that the district could improve network security.

> *During our interviews with district personnel, we noted that the district's anti-virus software policy is weakly enforced. We understand that many of the district's computers cannot run newer versions of anti-virus software. However, many capable computers do not run anti-virus software (i.e. scanning only certain attachments, scanning inbound files only, excluding folders from scanning, excluding the swap file from scanning, etc.) can significantly affect the perceived 'slow down' that anti-virus software can cause a computer. We recommend that anti-virus software be either password protected against changes or be configured to not allow termination of the anti-virus software. Also, a memo should be written to the district's formal security policy outlining the correct use of anti-virus software by end-users.*

The district could also improve by documenting speed and access standards for district network resources. Although the district utilizes a network performance monitor, which monitors Internet speed and access throughout the district and generates reports that compare daily, weekly, and yearly network utilization rates at all district sites, no one at the district level monitors or tracks this data.

> **We recommend that the district strengthen its security practices and create and implement written speed and access standards for network resources and monitor network utilization.**

Best Practice 6: Not Using

The district does not fully 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, 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 Alachua County School District uses technology to support communication in several ways. The district has an interactive website at www.sbac.edu. This website provides district and school contacts, school activities, district goals, etc. It also provides printable and downloadable copies of all school board policies and meeting notes and minutes. The district uses a Phone Home/Home Phone system to contact students (e.g.: the district contacts all 10th graders' parents to remind them of upcoming FCAT testing, etc.). Finally, the district has an email system and all employees have access. Staff report that email is used to reduce time-consuming meetings and to enhance communication between parties and is not used for meetings with voting issues.

However, the district is not using this best practice because it does not use its email system efficiently and effectively. Comments made at the teacher and principal focus groups indicated that many district employees did not even know they have a district email address, and most communication in the district is still made using hard copy. This is not cost-effective or time-efficient for the district.

Action Plan 5-5

We recommend the district train all personnel to use the district's email system and create usable email addresses for those who do not currently posses them.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Coordinating with Personnel Services, create an email system training schedule.
	Step 2.	Alert all personnel to training offerings and implement training.
	Step 3.	Identify personnel who do not possess email addresses during training and create usable addresses for them.
	Step 4.	Begin to disseminate information electronically rather than through the email system, to encourage staff to actively use their training and accounts and to improve the district's efficiency in disseminating information.
Who Is Responsible	Chief Technology and Information Services Officer, Director of Personnel Services	
Time Frame	December 2004	

Best Practice 7: Using

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

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

The Alachua County School District provides all students, parents, and employees with standard appropriateness and legality "use guidelines" for district technology. The district is CIPA (Child Internet Protection Act) compliant, meaning that all "questionable" sites are blocked on school computers. School board policy 8.72 "Acceptable Use Policy for the Exploration and Utilization of the Internet as a Tool for Learning" explains the purpose of accessing the Internet, resources available, acceptable Internet usage, privileges associated with use, monitoring warnings, copyright information, network etiquette, services offered, security protocols, vandalism and harassment warnings, procedures for use, inappropriate material warnings, and disciplinary actions for improper use. It is directed toward both district staff and students. The policy defines inappropriate material as "material that is determined inconsistent with the goals, objectives, and policies of the educational mission of the district." It also states that, "it is the user's responsibility not to initiate access to materials that are inconsistent with the goals, objectives, and policies of the educational mission of the district." The Code of Student Conduct, last amended in July 1999, includes rules for appropriate computer usage. Older students and parents must sign they have received, read, and understood these rules.

The district's use of FIRN (Florida Information Resources Network) is also CIPA compliant. Access to websites that have been identified as having inappropriate content are blocked through FIRN and other security firewalls. Among the less obvious sites that are considered inappropriate are chat sites, personal ad sites, anarchy-related sites, criminal skills sites, and cult/gothic sites. No issues of hacking have been documented.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY

Best Practice 8: Using
The district has established general controls in the areas of access, systems development and maintenance, documentation, operations, and physical security to promote the proper functioning of the information systems department.

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

The Alachua County School District has written technology procedures. The district also limits access to and release of confidential data. As stated in Best Practice 7 of this chapter, the district has security measures to block unauthorized uses of equipment. In addition to the virus software, firewall, and password protection already mentioned, the district also uses external security measures such as door and cabinet locks to protect equipment. The district limits access to and prevents release of confidential and sensitive data. A request form must be completed by all personnel desiring access to restricted or sensitive data. The request form is comprehensive and requires the signature of a person in proper authority to approve access. Users are given a password and are only able to access the information which is pertinent to their jobs.

While the district is using this best practice it could improve its operations in three ways. First, the technology polices and procedures are not centrally complied into one comprehensive manual. Instead, the district Technology Plan has served as the de facto standards and procedures manual for many areas. The plan includes numerous checklists and help sheets that detail processes. A review of selected written procedures suggests that are detail-oriented, clear, and applicable to the district's needs. However,

compiling all policies and procedures into a central manual would help organize this information and ensure that updates are completed in a timely and efficient manner.

> **We recommend that the district organize written procedures, checklists, etc. into one standardized procedures and processes manual and maintain an electronic copy for ease in regular updating.**

Second, the district could improve efforts to ensure that independent databases are managed effectively, and that they provide reliable and accurate data. The district does not provide oversight to ensure that independent databases are effectively managed, although in two areas, food services and transportation, there is weekly reconciliation between the departments' databases and the mainframe database. For more information on these databases, please refer to Transportation, Chapter 9 and Food Services, Chapter 10.

> **We recommend that the district technology department oversee the independent databases, at a minimum, ensuring that they are managed effectively in order to provide reliable and accurate data.**

Third, according to a June 2003 financial audit, the district needs to standardize programmers' processes regarding appropriate electronic security and control measures.

> *The district's Information Resources (I.R.) department utilizes a limited number of custom written applications running primarily on the district's . . . mainframe. Effective controls do not exist to restrict modified programs from being submitted into the production system by the programmer responsible for the modification. Additionally, not all program modification requests are formally approved or documented. Lastly, functional and technical documentation related to custom developed software is limited. We recommend that the district restrict programmers' access to the production system, create procedures to formally authorize all program modifications, and insure that documentation standards exist and are followed.*

Standardizing these processes, in accordance with the audit findings, would ensure that appropriate electronic security and control measures are in place.

Best Practice 9: Not Using

The district utilizes some project management techniques to analyze purchases and service delivery however, these methods are not formalized and user satisfaction is not gauged.

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.

Alachua County School District personnel informally review procedures and service/support delivery methods, however, these reviews do not systematically track new purchases or projects from planning through implementation and final user satisfaction.

For example, in 1998, the district began to search for new accounting software, using a team of analysts and end-users from the finance and human resources departments. Five major vendors responded to the district's RFP (request for proposal). The district narrowed the field to two vendors, but was concerned

since one vendor's mainframe system was not Y2K compliant. The other vendor, while more expensive, included the district's preferred human resources and payroll functions. In January 1999, the district began implementing the new accounting software system, anticipating full implementation in 6-8 months. The finance modules were implemented in 1999 and included requisitions, purchasing, supplies, inventory, general ledger, accounts payable, and user-friendly reporting. In the fall of 1999, shortly after the software purchase, the project manager left the district with the replacement project manager leaving in June 2000. This loss of key personnel, combined with the need to retrain new personnel, set the project back several years. Most recently, fixed assets modules from this software were implemented, however, the district has yet to implement the human resources/payroll system, one of the reasons this software was selected. In addition, technology support staff continues to receive many work order support requests for the aspects of the system that are operational (Best Practice 3 of this chapter). Together, these problems suggest the district did not fully appreciate the complexity of integrating this new system with preexisting resources, relied too heavily on limited personnel, and did not anticipate the training needs for staff working with the new system. Reviewing all purchases, especially problematic ones such as this, will ensure that the district adjust its future purchasing practices.

In addition, the district does not systematically assess user satisfaction with information technology products, service delivery, or the quality of management reports and related data driven information. Instead the district relies on complaints and other informal feedback to assess performance. By periodically assessing user satisfaction through surveys or comments into the work order system, the district could determine whether IT products, services and management reports meet user needs.

Action Plan 5-6

We recommend the district establish standard procedures for analyzing technology decisions and services from the planning through the implementation phase and end-user satisfaction.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Based on an improved technology planning process, ensure that new purchases are cost effective, in that they meet district needs while also ensuring that integration plans with existing systems clearly outline training needs, timeframe for deployment, etc.
	Step 2.	Review past purchases to identify the positive and negative consequences of past decisions and apply this information to future acquisitions.
	Step 3.	Establish a method and questions to periodically assess user satisfaction with IT product, services and reports, and use this information to guide planning, acquisitions and service delivery
Who Is Responsible	Chief Technology and Information Services Officer, Director of Administrative and Instructional Technology	
Time Frame	December 2003 and periodically thereafter	

6 Personnel Systems and Benefits

Summary

The Alachua County School District is using 6 of the 11 personnel systems and benefits best practices. The district effectively recruits and hires needs staff and then evaluates staff and addresses poor performance. The district also maintains personnel records, has good cost containment practices for Worker's Compensation and benefits and maintains an effective collective bargaining unit. To use the remaining best practice standards and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its personnel systems and benefits program, the Personnel Department should establish performance objectives and routinely assess performance. In addition, the district should compile climate survey information to improve employee support, use turnover data and other information to improve recruitment and retention, enhance training opportunities, develop a mentoring program for career service staff, improve re-evaluation efforts of poorly performing employees, establish clear criteria and consequences for unacceptable behavior, and develop and institute an absentee policy and monitor use of substitutes.

Background

The Alachua County School District employed 4,026 individuals during School Year 2001-02, of whom approximately 50% were instructional personnel. During the previous year the district had 3,954 employees (Exhibit 6-1).

The district has assigned responsibility for personnel records, application and hiring processes, new employee orientation, evaluation procedures and coordination, and district-wide training through 2002-03 to the director of Personnel Services. Financial and benefits packages are managed through the district's Risk Management Department.

The district's instructional staff application and employment processing are the primary responsibility of the instructional personnel specialist, with assistance from a certification specialist, a clerical assistant, and an administrative secretary. The certification specialist also ensures that all instructional personnel certifications are valid and current. Non-instructional application and employment processing are the responsibility of the non-instructional personnel specialist, with assistance from an administrative secretary and a secretary. Additional responsibilities of the Personnel Department are listed below.

- Staff development is the responsibility of the coordinator of special teacher programs/staff development, with assistance from an administrative secretary, a secretary, and a consultant.

- Benefit packages and collective bargaining are the primary responsibility of the executive director of Risk Management and the chief financial officer under the direction of the staff attorney.

- Workers compensation services fall in the domain of the executive director of Risk Management.

The organizational chart for the Personnel Services Department is shown in Exhibit 6-2.
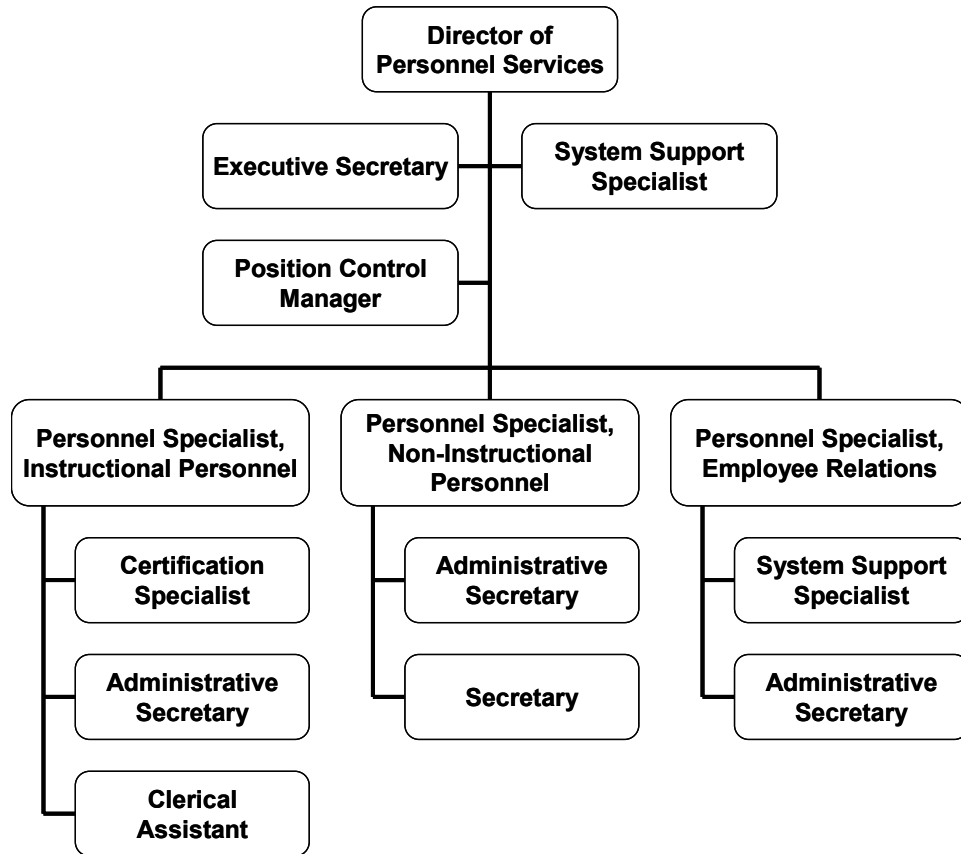
The Alachua County Education Association (ACEA) represents the district's teachers and career service employees in collective bargaining and is the only employee union for district employees. As of February 2003, 65% of the district's instructional employees and 46% of the district's career service employees were members of the union.

Exhibit 6-1
Alachua County School District Employees for School Years 2000-01 and 2001-02

Categories of Employees		Employees	
		2000-01	2001-02
Administrative Employees	District Level	62	59
	School Level	77	77
	Total Administrative	**139**	**136**
Instructional Employees	Elementary	661	663
	Secondary	690	692
	Exceptional Education	322	337
	Other Teachers	15	15
	Other Instructional Staff	288	304
	Total Instructional	**1,976**	**2,011**
Non-Instructional Employees	Professional	181	177
	Non-Professional	1,658	1,702
	Total Non-Instructional	**1,839**	**1,879**
Total Employees		**3,954**	**4,026**

Sources: Department of Education, Profiles of Florida School Districts, 2000-01, 2001-02.

Exhibit 6-2
Personnel Services Department Organizational Structure, July 2003

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                        ┌──────────────────┐
                        │   Director of    │
                        │Personnel Services│
                        └──────────────────┘
                                 │
        ┌──────────────────┐     │     ┌──────────────────┐
        │Executive Secretary├─────┼─────┤  System Support  │
        └──────────────────┘     │     │    Specialist    │
                                 │     └──────────────────┘
        ┌──────────────────┐     │
        │ Position Control ├─────┤
        │     Manager      │     │
        └──────────────────┘     │
                                 │
        ┌────────────────────────┼────────────────────────┐
┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐
│Personnel Specialist,│ │Personnel Specialist,│ │Personnel Specialist,│
│Instructional Personnel│ │Non-Instructional  │ │ Employee Relations │
│                  │   │    Personnel     │   │                  │
└──────────────────┘   └──────────────────┘   └──────────────────┘
        │                       │                       │
  ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
  │Certification │        │Administrative│        │System Support│
  │  Specialist  │        │  Secretary   │        │  Specialist  │
  └──────────────┘        └──────────────┘        └──────────────┘
        │                       │                       │
  ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
  │Administrative│        │  Secretary   │        │Administrative│
  │  Secretary   │        │              │        │  Secretary   │
  └──────────────┘        └──────────────┘        └──────────────┘
        │
  ┌──────────────┐
  │   Clerical   │
  │  Assistant   │
  └──────────────┘
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Source: Alachua County School District, 2003.

Activities of Particular Interest

- The district anticipates a cost-savings from instituting the Utah Substitute Training Program. Begun in school year 2002-03, this program trains district personnel to train substitutes, instead of hiring outside consultants to conduct the training. As this program is just beginning, there is no available data to substantiate the cost savings.

- The district's Risk Management instituted a "Watch Program," with a toll-free number for employees to report "wrong-doings" including workers' compensation fraud, sexual harassment, stealing, etc.

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	6-7
	3. The district provides a comprehensive staff development program to improve student achievement and to achieve and maintain high levels of productivity and employee performance among non-instructional, instructional, and administrative employees.	No	6-9
	4. The district's system for formally evaluating employees improves and rewards excellent performance and productivity, and identifies and addresses performance that does not meet the district's expectations for the employee.	Yes	6-12
	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.	No	6-12
	6. The district has efficient and cost-effective system for managing absenteeism and the use of substitute teachers and other substitute personnel.	No	6-14
	7. The district maintains personnel records in an efficient and readily accessible manner.	Yes	6-16
	8. The district uses cost-containment practices for its Workers' Compensation Program.	Yes	6-17
	9. The district uses cost-containment practices for its employee benefits programs, including health insurance, dental insurance, life insurance, disability insurance, and retirement.	Yes	6-17
	10. The district's human resource program is managed effectively and efficiently.	No	6-19
	11. For classes of employees that are unionized, the district maintains an effective collective bargaining process.	Yes	6-21

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Best Practice 1: Using

The district efficiently and effectively recruits and hires qualified instructional and non-instructional personnel, although improving the application process could fill positions more quickly.

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 Alachua County School District conducts preliminary background checks to verify the qualifications of potential employees, maintains up-to-date and accurate job descriptions, employs both short- and long-term strategies to address shortages, and ensures that the employee make-up reflects the student population. In addition, the district is working to improve the ease and efficiency with which potential employees can submit applications and to improve the efficiency for sharing personnel records with school-based administrators. While the district is using this best practice, the district could expand recruiting practices outside the local community.

Although district personnel use a variety of strategies to recruit job applicants, there are a large number of vacancies each school year (Exhibit 6-3). The district's recruiting and hiring practices could be improved to facilitate the application and hiring process.

Exhibit 6-3
Instructional and Career Service Vacancies
(Percentage of Total In Category) for 1999-2002

Year	Instructional Vacancies	Career Service Vacancies
1999-00	389 (19%)	406 (22%)
2000-01	367 (19%)	472 (26%)
2001-02	325 (16%)	451 (24%)

Source: Alachua County School District, 2003.

The district advertises vacant career service positions using websites, job boards, a vacancy hotline, newspaper classified advertising, and communication with 26 local agencies. The district uses temporary staff including other personnel services (OPS) and substitutes to fill vacancies.

Personnel Services Department employees recruit instructional personnel through a "Grow Your Own" process. Current career service employees, substitutes, and school volunteers are encouraged to fill vacant instructional positions in the district. In addition, the school board implemented several short and long-term strategies to address instructional personnel shortages by expanding employability criteria. This lets individuals teach while becoming certified. These employment categories are outlined below.

Short-term:

1. Substitutes: Fill temporary or extended vacancies.

Long-term:

2. Out-of-field teachers: A teacher certified in another area. These individuals must meet specific course requirements in a prescribed amount of time to continue employment in their present position. State law requires that all parents in a classroom with an out-of-field teacher be notified.
3. Experts-in-the-field: DOE rules note that these are persons who "possess expert skill in or knowledge of a particular subject or talent but do not hold a Florida teaching certificate."
4. Subject Area Experts: Teachers may be certified in an area other than that which they are teaching, but, due to training, are considered experts in the subject area position they fill.
5. Alternative Certification program: Florida's alternative certification program is "designed to support full-time teachers . . . who hold or are eligible for a temporary Florida Educator Certificate."

As shown in Exhibit 6-4, over the last three years 5% of teachers were classified as out-of-field and few were classified as experts-in-the-field. In addition, in the 2002-03 school year the district also had 38 instructional employees designated as subject area experts.

Exhibit 6-4
Instructional Positions Filled Through Expanded
Employment Classifications (Percentage of Total Instructional Personnel)

Years	Out-of-field Teachers (Full-Time)	Expert-in-the-Field Teachers
1999-00	83 (5%)	5 (<1%)
2000-01	83 (5%)	5 (<1%)
2001-02	100 (5%)	6 (<1%)

Source: Alachua County School District, 2003.

One obstacle interfering with attracting new employees to fill available openings has been the district's application process. Applications are only available in hard copy from the district office, requiring potential applicants to travel or use the postal service. In addition, Personnel Department staff must fax or mail applications and resumes to principals or other administrators for review. To address this barrier, the district hired an outside consultant to computerize the application process, with an estimated project completion date for school year 2004-05. Using a phase-in approach, online applications should be available by summer 2003 and eventually, principals and other administrators will be able to access these online applications from their primary location. This will streamline the process for both applicants and district administrative staff.

For internal promotions and transfers, district staff is also unable to electronically share employees' personnel files with school-based personnel. While basic information is electronically recorded, only personnel staff has access. If a principal wants to view an employee's file, s/he must visit the central office or request information be sent to the school, as long as no confidential information is requested (refer to Best Practice 7 of this chapter for further details).

The district could also improve its recruitment efforts by expanding searches outside the local area. The district tends to search locally for most employees, primarily relying on new university graduates, who are close at hand. Although some recruitment personnel attend a few state-wide job fairs, increased efforts to recruit non-local employees would enlarge the applicant pool. Increasing use of Internet job sites that reach national candidates and forming collaborative recruitment relationships with universities other than the University of Florida are two ways the district can accomplish this.

> **We recommend that the district expand its recruitment efforts by increasing use of the Internet, developing collaborative relationships with other universities and expand efforts that promote opportunities for individuals whose spouses are seeking employment with the local university or healthcare community.**

Best Practice 2: Not Using

Although camaraderie seems high in the district, more accurately assessing the work environment and addressing fully assessing compensation would lead to a more positive work environment.

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

The Alachua County School District monitors future retirement trends, maintains clear and effective channels of communication, maintains a high level of camaraderie among employees, and has a collective bargaining unit which annually compares salary and benefit packages prior to the collective bargaining process. However, the district is not using this best practice because it does not compile climate survey information, does not track and regularly analyze turnover data or retirement projections, and does not ensure that similar positions have similar pay classifications.

While principal and teacher focus group comments indicate that, in general, employees are pleased with their work place at each school, they were dissatisfied with overall district practices in several areas. In addition, 64.8% of respondents to our teacher survey strongly disagreed with the statement "morale among school district employees is at an acceptable level." The top three reasons teachers reported for their dissatisfaction were perceived low salaries and costly benefits, a lack of updated technology, and an excessive amount of work responsibilities. These systemic issues will require district-wide efforts, and cannot be fixed solely by the Personnel Services Department (See Chapter 2, Management Structures, for discussion of district finances and Chapter 5, Administrative and Instructional Technology, for discussion of the district's technology). There are, however, other steps the personnel office can take to improve its support of employees.

Compiling district-wide climate survey information would help identify and address other types of employee concerns. Assessing the reasons for employee dissatisfaction can be used to improve the work environment. Each year, schools complete climate surveys, but results are not analyzed at the district level. Compiling this survey data for the entire district may identify issues that the district could easily implement to improve employee satisfaction. Action Plan 6-1 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Action Plan 6-1

We recommend that the Personnel Department compile and analyze climate survey information district-wide to assess and improve employee support.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Using data from all schools and centers in the district, compile climate survey information.
	Step 2.	Identify issues that can be addressed by the district.
	Step 3.	Use identified issues to drive goal-setting and implementation.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel Services, Director of Charter Schools	
Time Frame	December 2003 and annually thereafter	

The district typically does not compile data on employee turnover rates, however, for this report, district staff gathered data from school years 1999-2002. As shown in Exhibit 6-5, there were only minor variations in the percentage of employees by category leaving the district over these three-years, with increases in 2000-01 due to a reorganization following budget cuts. Separations are increasing for instructional staff, suggesting the district should continue to monitor this trend.

Exhibit 6-5
The Percentage of Employees by Category Leaving District Employment, 1999-2002

Categories	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02
Career Service	20%	19%	19%
Instructional	11%	13%	15%
Administrative	6%	10%	5%

Source: Alachua County School District 2003, ValienteHernandez P.A. calculations, 2003.

The district first began tracking exit interview data for career service personnel in December 2002. Data from instructional personnel has been tracked since January 2001, following a Department of Education requirement, but this information is vague. That is, in the 2001-02 school year, 76% of teachers reported leaving the district voluntarily. Within that percentage, 32% relocated, 25% retired, and 24% cited "family/personal reasons", a category too broad to determine whether changes in district practice could improve retention. In addition, the district anticipates losing 220 employees over the next five years as DROP (Deferred Retirement Optional Program) participants complete their enrollment period (44 in 2003; 38 in 2004; 45 in 2005; 59 in 2006; and 34 in 2007). Although aware of these of upcoming vacancies, district staff did not increase recruitment efforts to fill these positions until February 2003. Action Plan 6-2 includes the steps needed to address this issue

Action Plan 6-2

We recommend that district staff use turnover and retirement data and exit interviews to identify future staffing needs and to assist in recruitment and retention efforts.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	The district should monitor separations by employment category, to ensure staff is aware of any trends suggesting increases in separations.
	Step 2.	During exit interviews and through other follow-up techniques, the district should solicit more specific information regarding employee reasons for leaving and information about employee experiences while employed.
	Step 3.	Survey new hires about the recruitment, hiring, orientation, and new employee support processes.
	Step 4.	Using anticipated retirement dates, ensure that staff are recruited and trained to fill critical positions in advance of the anticipated vacancy.
	Step 5.	Compiling the information from the described activities, identify employment issues that could effect recruitment and retention.
	Step 6.	Develop and implement strategies that would improve recruitment and retention efforts
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel Services	
Time Frame	December 2003 and annually thereafter	

Dealing with employee perceptions of low salary or pay inequities can be a major work environment issue within a school district. Multiple demands upon the limited resources within school districts prevent most districts from easily addressing these issues. District managers should maintain recent and accurate data on how their district compares with other districts and where internal pay inequities exist so that when resources are available, the district can use those resources effectively.

Alachua district employees believe that their salaries are low compared to other districts and often cited this as a reason for employee dissatisfaction. Exhibit 6-6 shows that the district's teachers' average salaries do fall below the peer average for all degree categories. This average comparison does not consider total compensation, including benefits, experience levels, and other factors that comprise the total compensation package. For example, one possible reason for Alachua's lower district salary averages could be that the relatively transient university environment within Alachua leads to less experienced teachers than its peers.

Exhibit 6-6
Average Teachers Salaries for Alachua
Are the Lowest Among Its Peer Districts in All Degree Categories

District	Bachelor's	Master's	Specialist	Doctorate	All Degrees
Alachua	$31,004	$35,440	$37,596	$42,588	$33,975
Bay	34,654	38,074	42,370	41,344	38,403
Collier	37,548	47,330	50,852	52,976	41,918
Lake	33,084	39,128	44,015	42,076	35,196
Marion	32,697	38,376	43,139	44,148	34,591
St. Lucie	34,330	41,867	47,482	43,206	36,996
Peer Average	34,459	41,155	45,574	44,748	37,421
State Average	$35,837	$42,516	$49,988	$48,750	$38,718

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

Best Practice 3: Not Using

The Alachua County School District could improve staff development by more effectively coordinating training and providing district-level oversight to school training programs.

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 Alachua County School District has a comprehensive new employee orientation program, accurately maintains training records, provides state required in-service activities, offers mentoring programs for instructional and administrative employees, encourages teachers to earn National Board certification, and maintains a pool of potential school administrators. The director of Personnel Services reported that the department has taken steps to improve staff development. In 2002-03 district efforts to meet state requirements for a comprehensive staff development program led the district to begin unifying all staff development processes, and this effort was still underway as of May 2003. Each school and department is responsible for identifying and addressing its own training needs. Each school receives a training budget based on the number of teachers, and schools can use these funds for school-wide training, department training, consultant-led training, or conference attendance, selecting trainings based on school

identified needs. Most training is conducted at individual school sites. Training is voluntary unless the subject matter is mandated by law.

Needs Assessment Surveys (NAS) are distributed to all employees and students during the second semester of each school year by the *Collaborative Resources for Enhancing Achievement Through Education* (CREATE) Council, a district-based professional development advisory board designed to coordinate staff development. NAS surveys collect myriad data, including training needs. This data is summarized into instructional and career service needs and distributed to department directors and school administrators for input into individual site training calendars for the year. All instructional personnel have individual professional development plans that include training needs, although, except for certification courses, attendance is voluntary. Career service personnel must attend required certification training and any training that is part of a formal corrective action plan, to improve performance.

District-wide instructional training courses are divided among the following categories: Technology: 30%, Effective Teaching Practices to Increase Student Achievement: 26%, Sunshine State Standards: 24%, Classroom Management: 7%, School Safety: 7%, Student Data Analysis/Student Gain Scores: 6%. As shown in Exhibit 6-7, training hours for instructional personnel almost doubled during the 2001-02 school year, likely because of newly adopted reading curriculum and state requirements. However training hours for administrative personnel have significantly decreased, possibly since administrators are no longer required to regularly attend leadership academy training.

Exhibit 6-7
Training Significantly Increased for Instructional Personnel,
But Decreased for Administrators

	Hours Spent in Training	
Year	Administrative Personnel	Instructional Personnel
1999-00	10,517	45,035
2000-01	3,780	40,288
2001-02	3,358	75,801

Source: School Board of Alachua County, 2003.

However, the district is not using this best practice standard for two reasons. First, overall staff development efforts are not organized as efficiently or as effectively as possible. For both instructional and career service staff, expressed and appropriate training needs are not always offered and the district does not adequately provide schools and departments information about available training and funding sources to support these identified training needs. In addition, the district does not monitor or coordinate school training opportunities to ensure that efforts are not duplicated. For example, if one school hosts Microsoft Word training, then, space permitting, it would be cost-effective to encourage teachers from other schools to travel to that site, rather than each school hosting its own training, as is done now. Creating a comprehensive training calendar that includes all training offered at each site throughout the district would reduce overlap and allow for the better use of funds. Finally, the district does not use in-service evaluations to assess the cost-effectiveness or success of training programs and the training program lacks long-term goals and objectives so the district cannot assess whether efforts meet district needs. Action Plan 6-3 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Action Plan 6-3

We recommend that the district enhance its training program.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish long-term goals and objectives for district-wide training programs that support school and department goals and objectives (See AP 3-1 for all steps needed to complete this phase).
	Step 2.	Create a standard method of surveying (or otherwise assessing) specific training needs by district, school, department, and/or category of employee beyond what is currently collected with the NAS (Needs Assessment Survey).
	Step 3.	Analyze data identifying needs.
	Step 4.	Coordinate training efforts among schools by implementing a district-wide on-line training calendar which principals can use to "advertise" courses offered at individual schools.
	Step 5.	During the annual principal planning meeting, include a training-planning agenda item with district staff development to ensure there is no overlap in the training offered at schools and that each school offer the training their academic data suggests are needed.
	Step 6.	Evaluate major training efforts and the progress toward meeting goals annually.
	Step 7.	Adjust course offerings based on the effectiveness of the training offered, school improvement plans, and assessed training needs based on survey information.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel Services	
Time Frame	June 2005 and annually thereafter	

Second, the district does not have a mentoring program for career service employees. The district understands the importance of mentoring, with a mentoring program for first year teachers and new principals. Further, in the 2002-03 school year, the district proposed extending the teacher support program for an additional two years to increase teacher's skills and retention. Offering a basic mentoring program for career service employees, using volunteer on-site mentors, would provide new career service employees clearer direction and on-site support. Action Plan 6-4 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Action Plan 6-4

We recommend that the district develop and institute an employee mentoring program for new career service employees.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	For departments with the greatest difficulty in recruiting and retaining career service employees, determine which categories of new employees would most benefit from on-the-job support.
	Step 2.	Develop a general mentor program to meet these support needs.
	Step 3.	Train relevant management personnel and as needed, volunteer mentors, on this support effort.
	Step 4.	Encourage supervisors to offer the program to new career service employees as applicable.
	Step 5.	Apply these same principles to other employee classifications as referenced in Best Practice 5 and 6 of this chapter.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel Services	
Time Frame	August 2004	

Best Practice 4: Using

The district's system for formally evaluating employees includes the elements that are generally desired in a performance appraisal system, although it could improves its follow-up of employees with substandard performance.

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 Alachua County School District has established and implemented procedures to assess all employees' performance. Employees are evaluated at least annually. School administrators' evaluations include input from teachers, assistant principals, and parents. Employees receive clear documentation of performance expectations, when they will be evaluated, and the consequences of poor evaluations. However, the district inconsistently manages poorly-performing employees.

All employees are evaluated annually using state-specified or district-created performance evaluation forms. Instructional employees are evaluated using two instruments, the Florida Performance Measurement System and the Collaborative Professional Development Model. Both include measures and standards related to student outcomes and an appraisal of the instructor's content area knowledge. Principals typically evaluate subject area knowledge by reviewing a lesson plan provided by the teacher.

Employees are informed of substandard performance ratings, and a copy of the evaluation is kept on file in the Personnel Services office. However, employees who receive poor evaluations are only re-evaluated annually. Interim evaluations or other steps to aid and measure progress in employee performance would strengthen claims for additional support or termination if performance does not improve.

> **We recommend that the district provide steps to aid and measure the interim progress of employees who receive needs improvement or unsatisfactory ratings in their performance appraisals.**

Best Practice 5: Not Using

The district does not ensure 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, nor are steps taken to terminate that person's employment.

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

The Alachua County School District ensures employees are tested for drugs in accordance with state guidelines, offers an assistance program to all employees, and identifies specific individuals to appropriately deal with employee performance issues. The district has several policies and procedures to address poor performance or harmful employee behavior. New employees are trained on the district's Code of Ethics and receive a copy of the district's policies which includes a section on staff ethics. If a complaint is filed against an employee, the district has 60 days to review documentation and investigate the allegation, and each case is handled independently. District policy describes the "narrowly-defined circumstances" in which an employee can be suspended with or without pay. However, the district is not using this best practice for three reasons.

First, the district does not provide training for mentoring and coaching for career service managerial personnel employees, even though these strategies can prevent and remedy poor job performance. Formal and informal training and support in coaching and mentoring teachers and other school-based staff are only offered to school-based administrators, and for operational areas for food and custodial service staff. The district should proactively provide this type of support to improve the overall job performance of career service employees.

> **See Action Plan 6-4 for the steps needed to address this issue.**

Second, the district has progressive discipline procedures for employees whose performance is repeatedly unsatisfactory, but those procedures are not used consistently. According to district policy, progressive discipline starts with an oral warning or reprimand delivered in a conference with the staff member and two administrators or supervisors. The employee is given an *Action Plan*, documenting the steps that must be taken to improve performance, the assistance the employee will receive, and the timeline for improvement. If the employee's behavior is still unsatisfactory at the following year's review (or before if the situation warrants it), a written reprimand is provided. Further problems require the district to suspend the employee without pay and the final step is termination of employment. Both suspension and the termination require significant documentation as well as board and superintendent approval.

During the 2000-01 school year, seven employees were functioning under progressive discipline plans, with six showing improvement and one terminated. In 2001-02, sixteen employees were monitored with 13 improving, 2 transferred to other positions, and one terminated. A review of randomly selected instructional personnel files revealed that several teachers received multiple years of poor evaluations, and there was no documentation on follow-up efforts to improve employee performance. Principal and teacher focus group responses indicate that poorly performing contracted staff do not have contract renewed, but that poorly performing professional services employees are transferred to other schools or duties, rather than having their employment terminated. Action Plan 6-5 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Action Plan 6-5

We recommend that the district improve its evaluation system for poorly-performing employees.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish more frequent evaluations of poorly performing staff.
	Step 2.	Ensure that all poorly performing employees are handled in accordance with established criteria and standards
	Step 3.	Ensure that opportunities to correct performance, through training, mentoring, referrals to employee assistance programs or other supports are provided.
	Step 4.	Document assistance provided and action taken.
	Step 5.	District personnel should monitor that appropriate actions are taking place and that follow-up is being done.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel Services	
Time Frame	December 2003 and ongoing	

Third, the district has not established criteria identifying staff behaviors and performance problems that are potentially harmful to students and that would warrant temporary removal or dismissal during or following a complaint investigation. In the three school years from 1999 to 2002, the district investigated 77 employees for behaviors such as sexual harassment, inappropriate language, racial statements, and physical contact. Seven of these employees were placed on paid leave during the investigation. In at least one case, the district assigned an employee accused of having an inappropriate relationship to change shifts in order to avoid contact with students. Three employees resigned as a result of these investigations, but none were terminated by the district. Without criteria to guide decisions regarding suspension and termination, it is not clear whether the level of suspensions and terminations represents adequately protection of students in these situations.

In addition, without criteria to guide district response, actions are open to interpretation, inconsistent management, and possible litigation. The district should establish criteria and then include standard district responses for each category for both the investigation and sanctions (e.g. whether the employee should be transferred, placed on leave, suspended with or without pay, or terminated). Action Plan 6-6 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Action Plan 6-6

We recommend that the district establish clear-cut and documented behavior criteria, evaluation procedures, and outcomes for managing behavior complaints and provide a copy to all employees.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Create clear behavior criteria and subsequent consequences.
	Step 2.	Provide written documentation to all employees of these criteria and potential outcomes.
	Step 3.	Maintain documentation of infractions and actions taken.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel Services	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Best Practice 6: Not Using

The district has no system in place for managing absenteeism, and the substitute employee management system is inefficient and not cost-effective.

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 Alachua County School District maintains an adequate number of substitutes to fill vacancies, provides orientation and training to substitute personnel, and uses a sick-leave buy-back program as an incentive to decrease absenteeism. However, the district is not using this best practice for three reasons.

First, the district does not monitor or track absenteeism rates for any class of employee, although the information is available at each site. There are also no policies or procedures to identify and manage excessive absenteeism. Currently, each department manager or site-based administrator must determine whether an employee's absenteeism is excessive and set disciplinary or other corrective procedures. Absentee rates were gathered for this review. In the 2001-02 school year, an average of 9.3% of instructional employees were absent each day. Those figures translate to each teacher, on average, being absent for more than 10 days during the school year. Also during that same year an average of 8.4% of career service employees were absent each day. This absentee data includes sick, administrative, and other leave days. No data was provided on absenteeism for district-level employees. The district should

take a more active role in tracking this information and ensuring that excessive absenteeism, when present, is handled consistently among sites. The district's only strategy to reduce absenteeism is to offer to buy back unused sick leave. However, the district has not analyzed the program's effectiveness or costs. The district should regularly compile employee absentee data, use this information to identify absentee trends or issues and, as indicated, consider alternative programs to reduce absenteeism. Action Plan 6-7 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Action Plan 6-7

We recommend that the district create and institute an absenteeism policy, compile and analyze annual absentee data by employee to identify excessive absenteeism or trends, and as indicated, consider alternative programs to reduce absenteeism.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Create a district-wide policy regarding absenteeism.
	Step 2.	Inform all employees of new policy.
	Step 3.	School designees should compile absentee data on all employees and analyze for trends or issues (including the categories of employees most absent, e.g. new employees, 10+ year veterans, etc.).
	Step 4.	Site-based administrators should review the absentee data analysis and address issues as needed.
	Step 5.	District personnel should monitor the tracking process and compile district-wide data and results annually.
	Step 6.	District personnel should use this information to assess the effectiveness of the sick day buy back program and determine if other strategies should be considered.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel Services, school Principals	
Time Frame	May 2004 and annually thereafter	

Second, the district's substitute search process is inefficient. While the district assists principals in recruiting substitutes and has made efforts to increase the available pool of substitutes in the rural areas, it does not offer schools support for identifying substitutes on a daily basis. When a substitute is needed, the employee contacts the site's "substitute manager", who is usually a school secretary, to contact substitutes. The site-based "substitute manager" uses an alphabetical list of substitutes to find one available for the time/date needed. If the district could automate a substitute employee management system, the hours spent searching for a substitute could be reduced. Action Plan 6-8 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Action Plan 6-8

We recommend that the district annually compile and analyze substitute utilization data. We also recommend that district personnel research automated substitute management systems for possible implementation, weighing the potential costs and benefits.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Compile school-based substitute use for the district and analyze it for trends or issues. Address issues as needed.
	Step 2.	Research automated substitute management systems used by school districts of comparable size.
	Step 3.	Conduct cost comparison analysis of maintaining current system or implementing automated system.
	Step 4.	If more cost-efficient to implement new system, do so.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel Services	
Time Frame	May 2004	

Third, while the district provides an orientation for substitutes, there is no specific ongoing training, especially for long-term substitutes. Every Monday, basic training is offered to persons interested in becoming substitutes and on their own time, substitutes can attend any school or district training. The district is working to improve this initial training, implementing the Utah State Program in the 2002-03

school year. This program uses district personnel to train substitutes instead of an outside consultant, is expected to improve training and retention as well as save the district funds. However, no special training is offered to long-term substitutes, though they may be based in a classroom for up to a full school year. Providing an on-site mentor, preferably the respective department chair or lead teacher, would assist long-term substitutes to manage the tasks associated with the position.

> **We recommend that the district expand its teacher mentor program to provide support to long-term substitutes, using the steps outlined in Action Plan 6-5.**

Best Practice 7: Using

The district generally 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 Alachua County School District maintains personnel records, including confidential records, in accordance with Florida Statutes and regulations and updates them in a timely manner. However, the system for maintaining files could be more effective and cost-efficient if it were automated.

The district maintains personnel files on all employees. These files include a separate "confidential file" with limited access for only the superintendent, assistant superintendent, principals, and deputy directors. These files are kept in accordance with Florida statutes and regulations.

A review of randomly selected personnel files revealed that, overall, files were maintained appropriately. However, several files lacked proper documentation including, but not limited to: evidence of required training such as sexual harassment training, a copy of employee's driver's license and social security card, and others identified "poor performance behavior" for consecutive years without evidence of follow-up.

> **We recommend that the district review its procedures for placing information into personnel files to ensure that required documents are included.**

The district uses hard copy for most records, although basic employee information such as position, salary, hire date, educational background, personal information (address, phone number, etc.,) and basic financial and benefits information is available through a computerized database. Personnel services staff can access this information at any time, however, principals and assistant principals can only access an employee's personal and position information. Although payroll information is handled through the employee's worksite, personnel administrators have access to that information as well.

In order for school-based administrators to access an employee's personnel file, they must either visit the Personnel Services office at the district office or request that non-confidential information be faxed to the school or department site. Administrators can view district office files on demand and records can only be amended at the district office.

The district has recently begun researching options for automated record keeping, and is considering costs, integration with other district technology, and ensuring information is properly protected for both professional and legal reasons.

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 Alachua County School District uses several cost-containment practices regarding workers' compensation claims. These include providing basic safety training and information to new employees as well as other voluntary training, establishing a safety team at each site as the first line of safety defense, and conducting annual inspections of each district facility. The district's third-party administrator also provides statistical data that the district uses for cost-containment.

The district is proactive in its attempts to cost effectively reduce the frequency and cost of workers' compensation claims. Efforts include:

- distributing a "New Employee Safety Training Manual" at orientation;
- providing basic safety training to all employees;
- establishing school-based safety teams;
- hosting a successful light duty program;
- completing a SREF (State Requirements for Educational Facilities) review, as mandated by the state; and
- directing the district safety officer to evaluate and rate sites' safety.

Through its third-party administrator, district personnel also annually review workers' compensation claims, with approximately 300 such claims per year for school years 1998-01. During that period, the Alachua County School District had the lowest percentage of claims, 5.20%, of nine districts in the trust consisting of Citrus, Lafayette, Lake, Okeechobee, Osceola, Santa Rosa, Suwannee, and Taylor.

The district's light duty program allows all employees, except those with severe restrictions such as "no use of limb," to be placed on alternate duty until they can return to normal duty. The executive director of Risk Management personally places and monitors all individuals in this category. This program seems to be working very well, although none of the procedures are fully documented. Documenting procedures, as well as the status of light-duty program participants, would ensure consistency of protocol, provide an on-going history of events for future reference, and allow continuation of established efforts with the least disruption to the program, should there be a change in the executive director position.

> **We recommend that the director of Risk Management document light duty procedures and track participant data through a monthly status report.**

Best Practice 9: Using

Although the district uses cost containment practices for its employee benefits programs, it could improve its analysis of the fiscal impact of early retirement and the information provided to the board.

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 the adverse effect of 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 Alachua County School District works with the union to review current benefits and evaluate alternatives prior to contract renewal, calculates the short- and long-term fiscal impacts of changes to the benefits program, and informs the school board of cost-savings and cost-avoidance issues related to benefits. To improve these processes, however, the district should calculate the fiscal impact of early retirement offerings and inform the board more frequently of cost data.

Every year prior to contract negotiation, the district and union negotiating teams review current insurance and benefits information. They conduct informal cost-analyses to determine if employees are receiving good benefits for a solid price.

Results of a survey on employee health insurance programs conducted by the Union County School District for 2001-02, are reported in Exhibit 6-8. The survey considered the overall health benefits offered to employees of eight nearby school districts, and with the exception of one district, the same company insured the remaining seven districts. However, because the survey did not include an in-depth comparison of each plan's benefits, this survey can only be used to highlight potential cost differences, and cannot be used to make any firm conclusions or comparison of the district plans. Exhibit 6-10 shows the results from the Union County School District Survey. In summary, Alachua has the third lowest premium charged for single employees and contributes the total cost for a single employee's health premium, unlike most other surveyed districts. For family coverage, two thirds of these districts offer more than one family health plan (identified as A, B, or C), with Alachua offering two plan choices and the district's employee premiums are among the lowest. All plans include a separate prescription deductible or co-payment prescription plan. Annual deductibles ranged from $250 (single) to $1,000 with Alachua's family deductibles ranging from $300 to $500. All except two districts offered plans with an office visit co-payment structure, with one of Alachua's two family plans requiring a co-payment. According to district personnel, changes to the benefit plans are considered and discussed extensively among Risk Management staff, finance staff, and the teacher's union.

Exhibit 6-8
Comparison Alachua and Neighboring Districts' Healthcare Coverage[1]

District	Annual Board Contribution	Premium Single	Premium Family	Prescription Plan	Annual Deductible	Office Visit Co-Pay
Alachua	**$2,078.40**	**$2,078.40**	**A: $4,801.20** **B: $5761.20**	**A: 80% of allowable** **B: $14/$40**	**A: $500** **B: $300**	**A: No co-pay** **B: $15**
Citrus	$1,440.00	$2,040.00	$4,806.00	80% of generic / 70% of non-generic	$250 single / $500 family	No co-pay, 80%
Dixie	$3,160.00	$3,010.56[2]	$7,883.52	$7 / $14	$500 single / $1500 max family	$20 GP / $25 specialist
Duval	$3,199.32	$3,199.32 HMO	$7,443.12	$10 / $15 / $30	$300 single / $900 family	$10 GP / $25 specialist
Flagler	$2,924.64	PPO: $3,584.76 HMO: $2,996.64	PPO: $9,300.12 HMO: $6,950.04	$5 / $15 / $30 $7 / $9 / $20	PPO: $300 HMO: None	PPO: $10 HMO: None
Gilchrist	$2,518.20	A: $3,513.33 B: $2,893.05	B: $8,326.71 C: $6,055.29	Both plans are $10 / $25 / $40	Both plans are $500	B: no co-pay, $500 deductible and 80% thereafter C: $15 co-pay for primary PPC and doctors
Levy	$2,000.00	A: $2.274.48 B: $1,977.84**	A: $6,118.92 B: $5,320.80	60%, deductible	A: $500 B: $1000	None
Putnam	$1,510.00	A: $3,858.60 B: $2,842.10 C: $2,391.00	A: $8,020.90 B: $5,400.00 C: $4543.00	80%, deductible $300 80%, deductible $750	$300	A: $20 B: None C: None
Union	$2,500.00	PPO: $3,575.52 Care Manager (CM): $3,111.72	PPO: $8,547.72 CM: $8,026.56	$15 / $30 / $50 $10 / $25 / $40	Both plans are $500	PPO: $25 CM: $15

[1] References to A, B and C reflect different plans offered by each district.

[2] If the annual board contribution is higher than the premium noted, the board covers only the premium amount in the single category, and up to that amount for family plans.

Source: Health Insurance Survey, Union County Schools, 2001-02.

Best Practice 10: Not Using

Although management of the Alachua County School District's Personnel Services Department is improving, several items still need to be addressed to increase efficiency and improve effectiveness.

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 Alachua County School District's Personnel Department has been reorganized several times over the past few years. From May 2001 to November 2002, the Personnel Services Department was reorganized four times. In May 2001, positions with similar duties and functions were clustered into one position. In July 2001, the director of Personnel Services requested a second evaluation and restructuring of the department. Then, in November 2002, the department went through a "task reorganization" wherein several positions were moved, adjusted, or added. Then, in May 2003, the district re-evaluated and restructured the Personnel Department as part of an overall district restructuring, fully adopting the newest organizational structure in July 2003.

Although the management of the department is improving, the district is not using this best practice for two reasons.

First, despite its reorganization efforts, the district has not compared its Personnel Services department to its peers. Preliminary analysis, completed for this review, suggests that Alachua, even in most recent reorganization appears to have a higher number of employees than four of its five peers (Exhibit 6-9). While there can be many reasons for staffing differences between districts, including unique district needs and the scope of responsibility within the department, it is important for the district to use peers as a starting point for assessing its own structure.

Exhibit 6-9
Comparison of Alachua and Peer Personnel Department Organizational Structures

District	Number Management Positions (excluding Assistant or Deputy Superintendents)	Number Mid-Level Positions (All Types)	Number Secretarial / Clerical Positions	Total Staff
Alachua [1]	4 (1 director, 3 specialists)	4	6	14
Bay	2 (1 director, 1 officer)	0	4	6
Collier [2]	8 (1 executive director, 2 directors, 1 supervisor, 2 coordinators, 2 managers)	3	11	22
Lake	1 (supervisor)	9	2	12
Marion	4 (1 director, 2 managers, 1 officer)	4	5	13
St. Lucie	3 (1 assistant superintendent, 2 directors)	6**	4	13

[1] Excludes Risk Management and Benefit areas.

[2] Includes 2 Human Resource Analysts.

Source: Alachua and peer districts' Personnel Department organizational charts and staff input 2003.

Second, although the district has made changes in several programs during 2002, additional improvements are needed. The department uses monthly staff meetings to identify and evaluate small operational changes, however, the department has not comprehensively evaluated it processes and procedures for efficiency and effectiveness primarily because of a lack of funds. In addition, Personnel Services Department's goals do not meet the standards for S.M.A.R.T. goals (specific, measurable, attainable, reasonable, time-bounded). For example, goals must be accomplished "within the school year," and are moved to the next year's plan if not met. In addition, while several objectives require funding, there are no linked funding sources, and expenditures that support goal achievement are not tracked. Finally, a full review of the department's goals and objectives is conducted "possibly one to two times a year" with progress updates at monthly staff meetings. However, review does not occur at set times. We recommend that the Personnel Services Department update department goals and objectives to

include fiscal impacts and specific timelines, and annual review of department goals, processes implemented, results obtained, and revisions made to assist in directing goals for the following year. Action Plan 3-1 in Chapter 3, Performance Accountability, includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Best Practice 11: Using

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 Alachua County School District has designated specific individuals to conduct collective bargaining negotiations and labor relations, has clearly identified team members' roles and responsibilities, identifies and conducts cost-analyses on potential issues, utilizes an attorney for collective bargaining procedures, and maintains negotiation records for more than the five-year recommendation. However, no annual training is provided to collective bargaining team members.

Both the district and the union have bargaining teams who negotiate annual contract changes. Current district team members include the chief negotiator (usually the staff attorney, but contracted when the position is vacant), legal assistant to the staff attorney, principals, Personnel Services Department staff, department heads, finance department staff, teachers, and career service employees. Current union team members include the union president, field director, teacher union members, and career service union members.

According to the legal assistant to the staff attorney, the roles and responsibilities of the team members were clearly defined at the collective bargaining workshop. Maintaining confidentiality was also addressed at the workshop. The timeline for establishing and negotiating district priorities is as follows:

- legal assistant sends out "call for review" of the current contract;

- issues to discussed during bargaining are raised during the first executive session;

- the executive session team (school board members, board's attorney, superintendent, chief negotiator for district, legal assistant) establishes each year's priorities from the identified issues;

- negotiations and collective bargaining process begins; and

- final decisions by negotiating teams are brought to board for ratification.

The staff attorney's legal assistant keeps negotiation records. During traditional bargaining processes, the meetings are tape-recorded, with notes taken by designated members of each team. During collaborative bargaining, the sessions are not recorded and notes are in the form of large presentation papers.

In 2001, negotiation teams participated in a training workshop on collaborative bargaining. Generally, the district practices traditional bargaining techniques, however, last year the teams decided to use collaborative bargaining. In traditional bargaining, a representative of each team is designated to present and discuss the team's interests. In collaborative bargaining, all persons on both teams may present and discuss. It is undecided yet which style of bargaining they will use in the next school year. Every member of each team was given training. Since team members rarely change, annual training is not provided.

7 Facilities Construction

Summary

The Alachua County School District is using 21of the 24 facilities construction best practices. The district does of good job of planning its construction projects, funds projects properly and efficiently, designs projects well, and effectively manages its construction projects. To use the remaining best practice standards and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its construction program, the district must evaluate its facilities operation and performance after three and five years of use, establish and implement accountability measures, and evaluate the program's overall performance against those measures.

Background

Alachua County is located in the north central part of Florida. It encompasses 965 square miles and includes the main campus of the University of Florida and the municipalities of Archer, Alachua, Cross Creek, Gainesville, Hawthorne, High Springs, LaCrosse, Melrose, Micanopy, Newberry, Waldo, and Windsor. The county had an estimated year-round population of 218,800 as of July 2001.

The Facilities Department provides planning, design, construction, and maintenance services for 24 elementary schools, 8 middle schools, 7 high schools, 7 educational centers, and 6 ancillary support facilities throughout Alachua County. The district's schools total approximately 4.8 million net square feet and serve a population of 27,638 Capital Outlay FTE (COFTE) students as of April 2002, for approximately 175 square feet per student (Exhibit 7-1). [1] The district's square foot per COFTE ratio is higher than the 147 average square feet per student ratio in the peer districts.

Exhibit 7-1
Square Feet Per Student is Higher Than Peer Districts

School District	Total Net Square Feet	Capital Outlay FTE	Net Square Feet Per Student
Alachua	4,833,460	27,638	175
Bay	3,864,541	25.353	152
Collier	4,885,933	34,129	143
Lake	4,460,457	28,966	154
Marion	5,451,819	38,377	144
St. Lucie	4,241,639	28,722	148
Peer District Average	4,580,878	31,109	147

Source: Florida Inventory of School Houses, April 2002.

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[1] COFTE, or Capital Outlay Full-Time Equivalent, is a subset of the regular student enrollment that does not include students that don't require school space, such as charter school students (unless the charter is district-owned conversion charter), students in juvenile justice programs, homebound, etc.

Alachua County has not built a new school since 1999 and does not project building any new facilities within the next five years due to a currently declining student enrollment. Capital improvement planning and expenditures are used to renovate and remodel existing facilities, eliminate relocatable classrooms, and provide additional classrooms to accommodate pockets of increased enrollment due to population shifts. The district proposes spending nearly $60 million on additions and renovations between 2001-02 and 2005-06 (Exhibit 7-2).

Exhibit 7-2
Five-Year Facilities Plans Focus on Additions and Renovations, 2001-02 Through 2005-06

Purpose	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	5-YearTotal
New Schools	0	0	0	0	0	0
Classroom Additions/Renovations	3,081,088	3,025,000	2,100,000	2,667,971	3,912,027	14,786,086
Maintenance/ Repair/Renovation	7,287,079	5,109,081	5,342,395	5,106,670	4,377,625	27,222,850
Other Capital Outlay	0	17,505,000	0	0	0	17,505,000
Total	10,368,167	25,639,081	7,442,395	7,774,641	8,289,652	59,513,936

Source: Alachua County School District, Five-Year Facilities Work Program, July 2001.

The program lines of authority are typical for most small district construction programs. As shown in Exhibit 7-3, the director of the Facilities Department works for the district's Executive Director of Facilities and Transportation and supervises the Facilities Planning Manager and project coordinators.

Exhibit 7-3
Facilities Construction Organizational Chart Effective July 2003
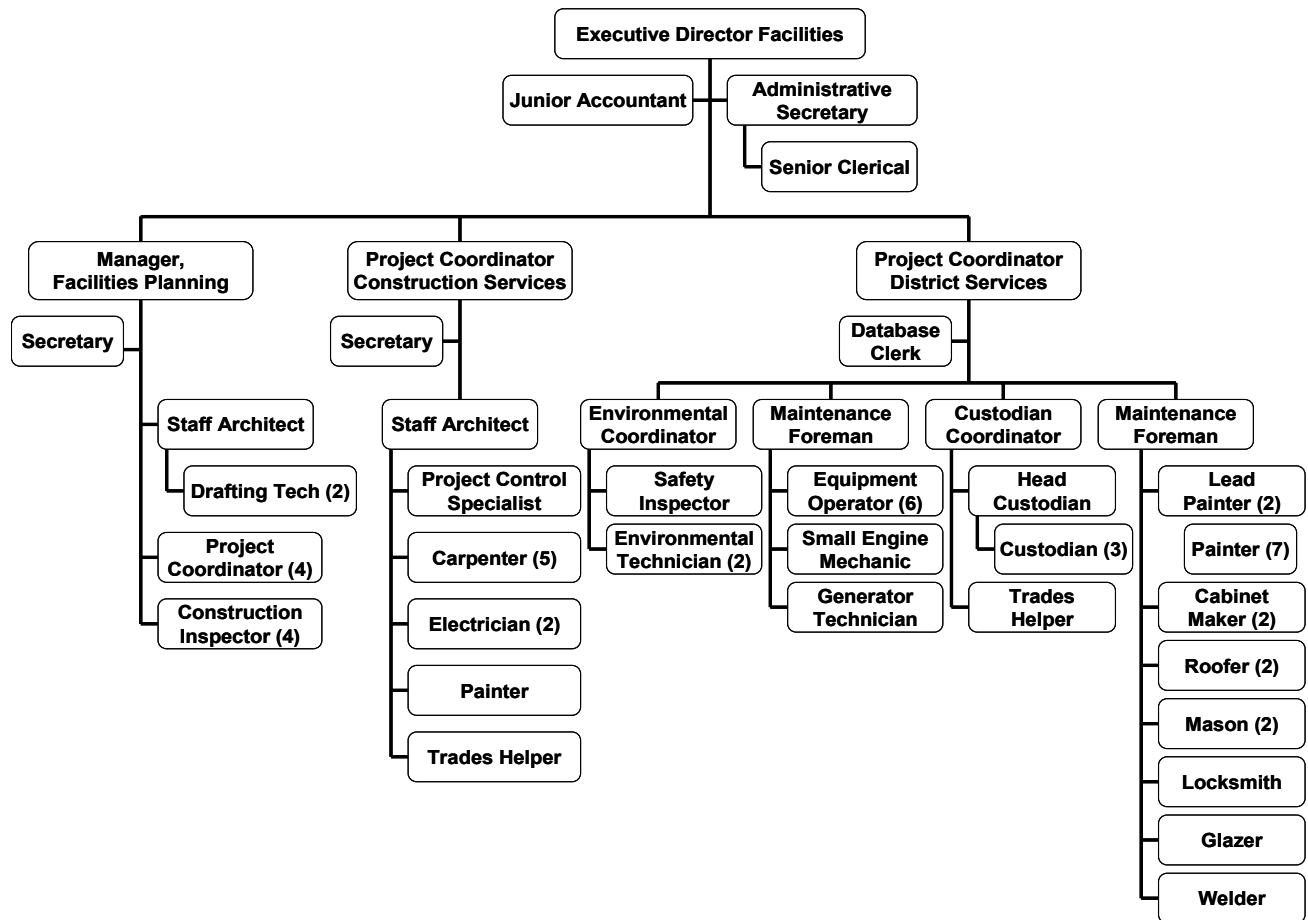
Source: Alachua County School District, 2003.

To evaluate the Alachua County School District construction program, construction services in the district were compared to a set of similar or peer districts, including Bay, Collier, Lake, Marion, and St. Lucie counties. As shown in Exhibit 7-4, the district has 4.833 million square feet and over the last 25 years, has had limited growth, with 5-year trends showing a declining student population. The average age of its facilities is 28 years, the eldest when compared to peers.

Exhibit 7-4
Alachua's Capital Outlay FTE Growth is Lower
and Its Facilities Are Older Than Its Peer Districts

Districts	Capital Outlay FTE	Total Net Square Feet	25 Year Average Annual Capital Outlay FTE Growth (1977-2002)	Average Age of Facilities
Alachua	27,638	4,833,460	0.56%	28
Bay	25,353	3,864,541	0.62%	24
Collier	34,129	4,885,933	3.76%	19
Lake	28,966	4,460,457	1.84%	25
Marion	38,377	5,451,819	2.25%	24
St. Lucie	28,722	4,241,639	3.27%	18

Source: Florida Inventory of School Houses, April 2002.

Activities of particular interest

The Facilities Department has an innovative program for developing the 5-Year Facilities Work Program. The district's "master planning process" is well organized and comprehensive, with steps that lead the district toward clear and realistic goals for facilities construction. The steps include: a comprehensive needs assessment and existing facilities review, the prioritization of needs, the development of alternatives and solutions to address needs, committee and board approval of project proposals, budgeting of appropriate funds based on need and availability, and commencement of construction. At each step of the way, stakeholder input is gathered and used.

The goals of the Master Planning Process are to:

- provide the school board and facilities planners with a clear understanding of the improvements needed to meet current State Requirements for Educational Facilities (SREF) standards and provide appropriately for future growth;

- base planning decisions on analysis of population projections, educational program needs, and facility conditions; and

- establish the priority for improvements based on need, not funding.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Conclusions for Facilities Construction Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
Construction Planning	1. The district has effective long-range planning processes.	Yes	7-7
	2. When developing the annual five-year facilities work plan the district evaluates alternatives to minimize the need for new construction.	Yes	7-8
	3. The five-year facilities work plan establishes budgetary plans and priorities.	Yes	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	7-11
	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
Construction Funding	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
Construction Design	9. The district develops thorough descriptions and educational specifications for each construction project.	Yes	7-15
	10. The architectural design fulfills the building specification needs as determined by the district.	Yes	7-16
	11. New construction, remodeling, and renovations incorporate effective safety features	Yes	7-17
	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	7-17
New Construction, Renovation and Remodeling	13. The district has effective management processes for construction projects.	Yes	7-18
	14. District planning provides realistic time frames for implementation that are coordinated with the opening of schools.	Yes	7-19
	15. All projects started after March 1, 2002, comply with the *Florida Building Code*.	Yes	7-20
	16. The district requires appropriate inspection of all school construction projects.	Yes	7-20
	17. The district retains appropriate professionals to assist in facility planning, design, and construction.	Yes	7-21
	18. The district follows generally accepted and legal contracting practices to control costs.	Yes	7-21
	19. The district minimizes changes to facilities plans after final working drawings are initiated in order to control project costs.	Yes	7-22

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
	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	7-22
Facility Occupancy and Evaluation	21. The district conducts a comprehensive orientation to the new facility prior to its use so that users better understand the building design and function.	Yes	7-23
	22. The district conducts comprehensive building evaluations at the end of the first year of the operation and regularly during the next three to five years to collect information about building operation and performance.	No	7-23
	23. The district has established and implemented accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the construction program.	No	7-25
	24. The district regularly evaluates facilities construction operations based on established benchmarks and implements improvements to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.	No	7-25

CONSTRUCTION PLANNING

Best Practice 1: Using
The district has an effective long-range planning process.

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

The Alachua County School District uses accurate and relevant planning information provided by knowledgeable individuals. The director of facilities and the facilities planning manager are responsible for facilities planning. The facilities planning area involves all facets of the planning, design, and construction administration for all physical facilities utilized by the district. The program takes a five-year view of the anticipated capital revenue and integrates it into a schedule of capital outlay projects. These projects include those that ensure the availability of satisfactory student stations for projected student enrollment in all K-12 programs as well as the major repair and renovation projects necessary to maintain optimal conditions in the educational plants and ancillary facilities of the district. This long-range program is the foundation for the annual capital outlay budget approved by the board.

Although the district is using this best practice, there is one area in which improvements could be made. The district does not have a facilities planning committee. The facilities planning committee can be the most valuable resource a district has in its facilities construction function. The committee can assist the school board in all facility planning activities including review and approval of Educational Plant Surveys, Five-Year Facilities Work Programs, Project Priorities Lists, and Capital Budgets. Typically a district-wide standing committee includes representation from the business community, parent groups, city and county authorities, and district staff. When organized, such a committee provides a broad base of support for the long-range plan and helps with community understanding of district facility needs.

The district should ensure that the standing committee:

- has its role established in writing with district goals, procedures, and processes as well as project responsibilities fully explained so members understand their role in the process
- has board-established goals and interim reporting targets;
- has an established mechanism for documenting decisions and reporting to the board;
- addresses future business needs and the resulting future educational program needs;
- addresses alternative program solutions and the feasibility of each; and
- periodically reviews the status of work on the long-range plan for the previous year to consider any changing parameters and to make recommendations to the school board for adjustments to the long-range plan.

> **We recommend that the district establish a facilities planning committee that includes school district personnel, parents, construction professionals, and other community stakeholders. The board should specify the committee's role and responsibility, establish goals and interim reporting targets, and hear committee recommendations.**

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 Alachua County School District's student population has slightly declined over the past several years. Projections indicate that this trend of a declining student enrollment will continue. However, population shifts have resulted in underutilized classroom space in some areas of the county while overcrowding exists in other areas. These shifts have created construction needs in some parts of the district, while other areas are operating at 50% capacity. As shown in Exhibit 7-5, the district ratio of the utilization of existing student stations (35,718) to Capital Outlay FTE (27,078 as of June 2002) is 76%. The district uses block scheduling and relocatable classrooms to minimize new construction. The district also attempted to rezone some elementary schools but did not receive needed public support.

Exhibit 7-5
Because of Population Shifts, Capacity Utilization Varies Across the District

Facility	Total Capacity	Capital Outlay FTE	Percentage Utilization	Projected Capital Outlay FTE 2005-06
Elementary Schools				
Alachua	645	459	71%	440
Archer Community	671	384	57%	365
Chiles	700	696	99%	677
Duval	577	371	71%	352
Finley	557	527	95%	508
Foster	571	334	58%	315
Glen Springs	600	422	70%	403
Hidden Oak	854	769	90%	750
High Springs	648	527	81%	508
Idylwild	847	535	63%	516
Irby	707	494	70%	475
Lake Forest	726	412	57%	393
Littlewood	870	608	70%	589
Metcalfe	852	584	68%	565
Newberry	609	438	72%	419
Norton	718	584	81%	565
Prairie View	644	266	41%	247
Rawlings	681	504	74%	485
Shell	491	295	60%	276
Talbot	933	866	93%	848
Terwilliger	811	588	72%	570
Waldo Community	290	190	65%	172
Wiles	867	678	78%	660
Williams	553	397	72%	379
Total Elementary	**16,422**	**11,928**	**73%**	**11,477**
Middle Schools				
Bishop	1,568	1,147	73%	1,090
Fort Clarke	1,215	952	78%	895
Kanapaha	1,283	959	75%	902
Lincoln	1,199	985	82%	929
Mebane	870	569	65%	513
Oakview	819	539	66%	483
Spring Hill	719	448	62%	392
Westwood	1,674	963	58%	907
Total Middle Schools	**9,347**	**6,562**	**70%**	**6,111**
High Schools				
Buchholz	2,344	2,337	100%	2,298
Eastside	2,226	1,612	72%	1,573
Gainesville	2,016	1,905	94%	1,866
Hawthorne Jr/Sr	885	635	72%	597
Loften	660	284	43%	246
Newberry	686	619	90%	581
Santa Fe	1,134	1,196	105%	1,158
Total High Schools	**9,949**	**8,588**	**86%**	**8,319**
Total District	**35,718**	**27,078**	**76%**	**25,907**

Source: Florida Inventory of School Houses, June 2002.

Although the district is using this best practice, it can improve efforts for considering construction alternatives. While the district does not anticipate needing new construction, projects focus on renovating existing schools to accommodate shifts in the student population. That is, while the overall population is decreasing, population centers are shifting, so that some schools have enrollment levels that are over capacity while others have excess student stations.

There are many alternatives to new construction available to a district. Some alternatives are clearly better than others and some are more appropriate for large fast growing districts than for smaller districts with small increases or a shifting student enrollment. Nevertheless, there are pros and cons to each option, some of which are discussed in detail below. The options include:

- using relocatable classroom facilities to meet short-term needs;
- using non-traditional grade configurations;
- remodeling and resizing existing facilities;
- using multi-track school calendars;
- converting under-used properties to alternate uses such as changing elementary schools to K-8 schools; and
- rezoning to shift populations.

Relocatable classrooms allow districts to temporarily increase the classroom space in a school that has reached student capacity. However, uses of these expansion options do not resolve all problems since overall school capacity in terms of cafeteria facilities and other special areas are not increased. Too many relocatables can detract from the school's basic infrastructure, and therefore they can only be considered a temporary solution.

Non-traditional grade configurations can delay the need for new high schools. The size, general configuration, and additional structures required by high schools makes them the most expensive facilities to build while elementary schools can be built on much less land and are the least expensive facilities to build. Keeping ninth graders in the middle/junior high level and keeping sixth graders in the elementary level, would allow the district to meet any immediate needs for new high schools and limiting construction or renovation to less expensive elementary schools.

Remodeling and resizing existing facilities allows districts to combine several small spaces and enlarge them or take larger classrooms and reduce their size to meet smaller class size standards. However, this strategy works best with newer facilities, which were designed to allow for structural reorganization. However, this option is not as cost effective for older facilities that used permanent interior structural supports.

The multi-track school calendar breaks up the summer vacation into shorter, more frequent vacations throughout the year. Multi-track divides students and teachers into groups or "tracks" of approximately the same size, with each track following its own schedule. Implementing a four-track year-round calendar extends a school's capacity by 33%. For example, under the multi-track system, a school with the capacity for 750 students can accommodate 1,000 of them since three tracks with 250 students each would always be in school and one track would always be on vacation or intersession. Students attending year-round schools go to the same classes and receive the same instruction as students on the traditional calendar, without overcrowding. It also incorporates the educational values of single-track year-round education and "intersessions", the blocks of time created by breaking up the long summer vacation into a series of shorter vacations. However, the public generally doesn't like a multi-track, modified year-round calendar because of associated childcare requirements during vacation periods, conflicts with extracurricular activities, and disruptions to family schedules if not all district schools are reorganized. Thus, this change requires community-wide planning to ensure acceptance.

Converting under-used properties to alternate uses allows districts to change how space is used. For example, converting an elementary school to a middle school, adding a magnet program at an under-

utilized school, or leasing unused space to a charter school changes the use of existing space. Each of these options would help the district reduce unused capacity.

The final alternative involves the district reviewing school boundaries and adjusting these boundaries to better distribute student populations among schools. Rezoning has not been popular with county residents. The last attempt to rezone was rescinded due to heavy parent objection. The district needs to ensure that parents are very involved in the decision-making process to have success with this alternative.

> **We recommend that the district develop a plan to address unused capacity and classroom size reduction issues, including a thorough review of alternatives to new construction, analysis of short and long term cost implications, and consideration of the overall advantages and disadvantages of each alternative.**

Best Practice 3: Using

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

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

The Alachua County School District's Five-Year Facilities Work Program has established clear budgetary plans and priorities. The document offers a schedule of estimated capital outlay revenue from each currently "approved" source, which is estimated to be available for expenditures on projects included in the work program. It also includes a schedule for major repair and renovation projects needed to maintain district facilities, indicating which projects listed on the work program will be funded from current revenues.

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 Alachua County School District holds regular community meetings to discuss information regarding construction programs. The school board provides timely notice to the public of dates and agendas for

upcoming meetings. During meetings, the district provides a clear explanation of each construction project in a format that allows for public response.

Although the district is using this best practice, there are two areas in which the district could improve communication about the construction program and the five-year facilities work program. First, as discussed in Best Practice 1 of this chapter, the district does not have a facilities planning committee. A committee would ensure that the business community, parent groups, city and county authorities, and district staff understand and accept the long-range plans and the overall district facility needs. The recommendation in Best Practice 1 from this chapter addresses this opportunity.

Second, feedback from parents in the community indicates that advertising for meeting notices is the only method used to inform them of meeting dates and time. While district board meetings are televised and rebroadcast at different times to allow community viewing, the district could improve its efforts to ensure the public understands how to provide the district with feedback about planned construction and renovations.

> **We recommend that the district use its website, flyers, and school notices to ensure the public is aware of facility plans and understands the how to provide input into these plans.**

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 Alachua County School District has appropriate site selection procedures, even though site selection has not been necessary since 1990 and there are no anticipated needs to use these procedures for at least the next five years. In 1990, the school board appointed a 17-member committee with representatives of the city and county commissions, North Central Florida Regional Planning Council, Friends of Alachua County, Association of School Advisory Committees, Alachua County Education Association, Alachua County Council of PTAs, and members-at-large. The committee was responsible for locating suitable sites, either to purchase or as gifts, for future schools and considered the following factors:

- convenience for student transportation, both on foot and for efficient bus routing;
- available acreage for buildings, recreation, and parking with a minimum of fifteen acres per elementary school site, thirty per middle school site, and sixty-five per high school site;
- sufficient distance from active airport pathways and railroads;
- ease of access, with a minimum of two roads reaching the site;
- avoidance of traffic hazards, noise, smoke, dust, and offensive odors; and
- availability of utility service for water, sewage, and electricity.

Best Practice 6: Using

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

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

The Alachua County School District demonstrated that, for a newly acquired site, established criteria and ranking system allowed the district to compare different appraisals. School board minutes and the content of the appraisals show that the district considers obstacles and Florida law when selecting sites. These include issues such as transportation plans, zoning, environmental concerns, and neighborhood concerns for each site selected.

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 Alachua County School District uses several fund sources for capital improvements

- PECO—Public Education Capital Outlay funds are supplied by the state from taxes on gross utility receipts. These funds can be spent only on capital items identified in the five-year facility work program.

- $2 mill property tax—The district assesses 100%of the maximum 2-mill amount. These monies have the same restrictions as PECO.

- CO and DS—Capital Outlay and Debt Service funds are supplied by the state from automobile tags and taxes on wagering. These funds can only be spent on items listed on the Project Priority List. This source provides the least amount of funding with the most restrictions.

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.

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 (PECO) 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 Alachua County School District follows all funding guidelines pertaining to PECO maintenance, PECO new construction, CO and DS capital, and two-mill funds. The district uses capital outlay funds for new construction, renovations, and to upgrade and maintain existing facilities. During the last three years, the district has focused solely on renovations and remodeling existing facilities and the district expects this to continue over the next five years. Exhibit 7-6 lists the sources of available funds to finance capital projects.

Exhibit 7-6
A Variety of State and Local Funds Can Be Used to Finance Capital Projects

Sources of Funds to Finance Capital Projects	
State Funds	
Capital Outlay Bond Issue Funds	Bond issue proceeds received from the State Board of Education issued at the request of the District based on bonding capacity. The fund source is the state motor vehicle license revenue.
Capital Outlay and Debt Service (CO and DS) Funds	Funds received from the state based upon the constitutional funding formula. The fund source is state motor vehicle license revenue.
Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO) Funds	Funds received from the state for the construction and maintenance of schools. The fund source is the state gross receipts tax revenue.
Classrooms First Fund	Funds received from the state for construction of new school buildings, additions to existing buildings or for major remodeling and/or renovation projects based on specific criteria. The fund source is state lottery revenue.
School Infrastructure Thrift (SIT) Funds	Incentive award program to encourage functional, frugally constructed facilities. The program encourages districts to find ways to reduce the cost of, or eliminate the need for, constructing educational facilities. The fund source is state lottery and state non-recurring general fund.
Local Funds	
Capital Improvement Tax Construction (2 Mill) Funds	Funds received locally from the assessment of property taxes (maximum levy is 2 mills) for the construction and maintenance of schools. The fund source is local property tax revenue.
Section 237.161 and Section 237.162 *F.S.* Loan Funds	Funds for capital projects financed by cited statutory provisions for loans. The fund source is the local lending institutions based on borrowing capacity.
Local Capital Improvement Funds	Funds received locally. The fund source is local revenue.
Certificates of Participation	Funds received from the issuance of Certificates of Participation used for acquisition and construction of schools and ancillary facilities. The fund source is local lending institutions based on borrowing capacity.
Half Cent Sales Tax	Funds received from a tax levied pursuant to the vote of the people of the district. The fund source is a local sales surtax.

Source: Florida Department of Education, 2003.

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 Alachua County School District has a unique set of educational specifications for each new school, project, or renovation. The primary purpose of the educational specifications is to relate to the design professionals what programs are to be housed in the facility and what the design implications of those programs may be. Many of the essential components are discussed by district personnel and ultimately included in the project; they are formally documented in the educational specifications. For all projects, there are educational specifications that:

- state the project rationale;

- provide a narrative description of the project;

- relate the program goals and instructional philosophy;

- address school-community relationships;

- say whether the project will serve all or parts of the district on a open enrollment basis; and

- report whether the new facility will be a "magnet" or other special school.

The district has developed a set of standardized educational specifications for the various types of school plant facilities within the district, i.e.: elementary, middle, and high schools. Standardized specifications augment program uniformity across district schools and eliminate some effort duplication. Standardized specifications, however, cannot eliminate the need for an individually considered specification for particular projects since each project will have its own unique characteristics. The district begins the planning process with standardized specifications and adjusts these plans based on the individual project needs. The educational specifications document provides an opportunity to customize the specifications for the school's particular purpose. Once the final design is complete, the educational specifications can be compared against the final product to determine if all needs are addressed. By performing this activity, the district has been able to minimize the need for change orders once construction has begun.

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 Alachua County School District develops educational specifications, which provide a complete description of the project, including:

- a description of how students, staff, and visitors will arrive at and depart from the school including bus loading and unloading that is separate from other vehicle traffic;

- parking requirements;

- access for disabled persons;

- provisions for emergency vehicle and service access;

- accounts of the public address, closed-circuit television, telephone, computer networking, and security systems.

- well planned circulation patterns within classrooms and between activity areas;

- district security considerations;

- a report of potential community use of the building; and

▪ narrative of future expansion possibilities.

The design team uses the educational specifications to create specific plans for each project. The project architect is a member of the design team. The design team reviews the drawings at each stage of development to ensure that plans match the educational specifications.

Best Practice 11: Using
New construction, remodeling, and renovations incorporate effective safety features.

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

The Alachua County School District's building prototypes include security systems, fire systems, intercommunication systems, exits from every classroom, and lockdown procedures. The district has an efficient safety department with systematic processes for policy identification, site inspection, and correction of non-compliance. All recent remodeling and renovations included safety features such as exit signs, lighting, and security systems, and these complied with applicable district, state, and federal policies.

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 (Soundly Made, Accountable, Reasonable, and Thrifty) school design philosophy and develop practical design solutions that are functional and cost-effective.

The Alachua County School District used prototype school designs for its two newest construction projects: Chiles Elementary and Kanapaha Middle schools. These schools were built using adapted district school prototypes. No new schools have been built since the Department of Education developed the state prototype SMART designs for schools. Exhibit 7-7 compares actual construction costs to costs allowed by the state for public funding.

Exhibit 7-7
Comparison of District Construction Costs to Allowable Costs

Project (Completion Date)	Original Contract	Actual Contract	Student Stations	Allowable Cost per Student Station	Cost per Student Station
Kanapaha Middle School (May 1996)	$14,336,000	$14,336,025	1,426	NA	10,053
Chiles Elementary School (September 1999)	8,992,561	7,489,797	700	12,023	10,699
Waldo Community School (November 2000)	1,202,836	1,234,932	200	12,490	6,175
Mebane Middle School (March 2001)	2,737,200	2,387,516	0 [1]	14,493	N/A
Archer Community School (August 2001)	3,248,000	2,792,513	179 [2]	12,733	15,601
Williams Elementary School (February 2002)	$771,433	$826,197	0 [3]	$12,776	N/A

[1] Construction was for administration building and food service building. There are no student stations assigned.

[2] Costs were for the construction of classrooms and a food service facility. Costs for the food service facility skew the student station amount.

[3] Construction was for conversion of food service building to administration building. There are no student stations assigned.

Source: Alachua County School District Project Summary Sheets, 2003.

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 Alachua County School District manages its construction process effectively. The district uses the traditional fixed price methodology. With this methodology, the district uses a qualification-based selection process, to retain an architect to design the project based on program requirements (educational specifications). Upon district approval, the architect prepares contract documents for bidding that consist of plans and specifications. The district then directs the architect to put the project out for bid, and a general contractor is selected based upon the lowest responsive bid. Although not documented, the district has looked into alternatives that it thought might save costs and maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the construction program, make projects flow without delays, and, in general, to improve documentation of management decisions. The director of facilities is assigned the overall responsibility of keeping the facilities construction program within budget and on schedule.

Although the district is using this best practice, the district should undertake an evaluation of the potential costs and benefits of alternative construction service delivery methods. At the beginning of each project,

the school district must select the process for design and construction. There are many choices, including traditional design-bid-build, construction manager-at-risk, design-build, continuing service contracting and performance contracting. The best choice is the process that aligns most closely with a project's overall requirements. Alternatives to the traditional fixed price method are described below.

Design/Build: The design/build process offers a single source of responsibility for both design and construction phases. In most cases, the district contracts with a general contractor, who, in turn, sub-contracts the architectural work. In some cases, however, the architect is the general contractor's employee. The district advertises for design/build teams to submit total cost bids to design and construct a building based on a district established programs and criteria. Design/build is most often used for uncomplicated projects that have pre-determined functional requirements or projects that are designed and constructed the same way many times.

Construction Management: With this process, the district hires a construction manager based on qualifications. This individual provides services before, during, and after the actual construction process. Prior to the start of the project, a construction management fee and risk are negotiated and outlined per the construction management agreement. The construction manager provides leadership on all matters relating to construction and keeps the project team informed. The manager establishes and evaluates the project budget and schedule, provides real-time information to the owner, reviews and coordinates the bid package, oversees all bidding, writes the contracts for the district, manages procurement of material and supplies, coordinates work of all trade contractors, assures conformance to design requirements, provides current cost and progress information as the work proceeds, and performs other construction-related services as required by the owner. Benefits include district cost savings, fast track schedule, and the expertise of a construction manager in pre-qualifying subcontractors and vendors.

Construction Manager-at-Risk: A construction manager-at-risk is a sole proprietorship, partnership, corporation, or other legal entity that serves as a general contractor and assumes the risk for construction, rehabilitation, alteration, or repair of a facility at a contracted price. The construction manager consults with the district providing advice and construction leadership during the planning and design phases and provides construction leadership, contract management, direction, supervision, coordination, and control of the work during the construction phase. While the district generally contracts separately with the design professional, the construction manager contracts directly with the trade contractors. Under this scenario, the construction manager has control over the means and methods of construction, the management and safety of workers, and delivery of the completed work consistent with the owner's cost, time, and quality requirements.

> **We recommend that the district consider the advantages and disadvantages, as well as the costs and potential cost savings, of alternative means of delivery of construction services, such as design/build, turnkey, and the use of privatization.**

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 Alachua County School District planning process provides realistic time frames for implementation that are coordinated with the opening of schools. Time frames are established in the contract documents and later defined in the contractual agreement. The time frame states the number of days beyond the "notice to proceed," with a specified date identified for final completion. The notice to proceed is the authorization to begin the work in accordance with the construction contract and the contract documents. Further, the date of this notice is established as day "0" (zero) of the stated time of completion of calendar days in accordance with the bid and the construction contract. Completion dates are implemented to coincide with the start of the school year or semester to minimize the impact on students.

The board receives updates on major construction projects after each phase is completed. Any amendments to the original budget are presented to the board for approval. Although competed construction coincides with the opening of schools, the district often has a "punch list" of items remaining to complete after the opening of a new building. While punch list items tend to be minor, there may be construction type activities occurring during/after school hours that could interrupt student learning. However, the district has taken steps to ensure that these interruptions are minor, with most activity taking place prior to or after school hours.

Best Practice 15: Using

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

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

The Alachua County School District demonstrates that staff has knowledge and understanding of the Florida Building Code. District staff documented attendance at a regional workshop hosted by the Department of Education, designed to explain differences between the Florida Building Code and the Uniform Building Code.

The district has a contractual agreement with the University of Florida, Division of Environmental Health and Safety, to address code compliance requirements. This includes providing construction plan reviews, permitting, and code inspection services for capital projects in accordance with Florida Statutes and the Florida Building Code.

Best Practice 16: Using

The district requires appropriate inspection of all school construction projects.

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

The Alachua County School District requires and obtains appropriate inspection of all school construction projects. As described in Best Practice 15 of this chapter, the district has a contractual agreement with the University of Florida to address the compliance requirements of the Florida Building Code. The district demonstrated that the final inspection and certificate of occupancy were obtained on Kanapaha Middle, Chiles Elementary, Waldo Community, Mebane Middle, Archer Community, and Williams Elementary schools before buildings were occupied. This provides assurance that the buildings are safe and ready to meet the needs of students and staff. The Department of Education verifies that a certificate of occupancy is filed before a building is occupied. Inspectors from the University of Florida, certified under the Florida Building Code, complete the inspections.

The district, via the facilities planning manager, is responsible for updating its Florida Inventory of School Houses (FISH) data online. FISH information is verified during a plant survey that is required every five years. The district is required to submit a new plant survey in June 2004. During this process, the party conducting the plant survey independently verifies the number of student stations and teaching stations listed in the new FISH document.

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 Alachua County School District demonstrated that procedures to select appropriate professionals to assist in the process of facility planning, design and construction comply with legal requirements. The district also demonstrated that professionals are used early in the planning process to help define project goals and needs, assist with site selection, and to help clarify educational specifications and the facilities list. Additionally, the district has four licensed architects on its facilities staff: the executive director of facilities and transportation, director of facilities, facilities planning manager, and staff architect.

Best Practice 18: Using

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

A district should have policies and procedures which delineate bid solicitation and contracting practices, in order to control costs and protect itself from litigation. These policies and procedures should be 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 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 Alachua County School District uses "construction manager at risk" as its preferred delivery method. The district also uses generally accepted bidding procedures and can demonstrate compliance with Florida law. The district supplied examples of a bid advertisement, a bid tabulation, and an American Institute of Architects (AIA) contract with a contractor, a contract with an architect, a bid bond, and other legal documents to demonstrate bidding and award of contract procedures. Included in the documents were contracts signed by the appropriate district officials as well as required documents from the contractor. These included a signed owner-contractor agreement, a Workers' Compensation insurance certificate, a payment bond, and a performance bond.

Although the district is using this best practice, the district should consider construction delivery system alternatives to maximize the efficiency or effectiveness of construction projects. At the beginning of a project, the district must select the process for design and construction. There are many choices. The best choice is the process that aligns most closely with a project's overall requirements, as described in Best Practice 13 of this chapter.

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 Alachua County School District relies on School Board Policy 8.53 to govern change orders. This policy authorizes the superintendent to execute any construction contract change order which decreases the construction contract amount or increases the construction contract amount by twenty-five thousand dollars ($25,000) or less, provided the approval is in the best interest of the school board. The superintendent must report each approval to the school board, so changes are documented in the official minutes at the next regular board meeting. To assure that the board receives quality work and maximum value, changes are put out for bid whenever practical or feasible.

District documents for projects at Kanapaha Middle, Chiles Elementary, Mebane Middle, Waldo Community, Archer Community, and Williams Elementary, and Newberry High schools demonstrate compliance with board policy. Change orders that exceeded the threshold amounts stated above were submitted to the board for approval.

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 Alachua County School District pays construction projects based on a percentage of work completed and upon approval that includes recommendation for payment from the project architect. Payment records reflect that the architect recommends payment based on the percentage completed (as verified by the architect) and that a percentage is withheld until final completion. Payment is made based on a pay request signed by the architect and the project manager's ensuring that the payment is based on work completed. This procedure is essential because a contractor may fall into adverse financial conditions making the completion of the project questionable. The approval by the project architect of "construction draws" is a standard business practice found throughout the country.

FACILITY OCCUPANCY AND EVALUATION

Best Practice 21: Using

The district conducts a comprehensive orientation to the new facility prior to its use so that users better understand the building design and function.

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

The Alachua County School District conducts a walk through for all operational staff at the opening of each new facility, which includes a comprehensive orientation program for district and school-based administration, maintenance, and custodial staff. The orientation program provides an understanding of the location and use of systems by the persons responsible for the building operation. For example, staff is knowledgeable regarding the location of all electrical rooms or how to shut down the HVAC system. In addition, safety training is required of all school-based staff. This training includes emergency procedures for the building such as evacuation procedures, location of fire extinguishers, handling a bomb threat, and lockdown procedures. The training programs provide building users with information needed to better understand the building design and function.

Best Practice 22: Not Using

The district conducts comprehensive building evaluations at the end of the first year of the operation, but does not do so 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 Alachua County School District conducts a walk through at the completion of the first year of operation as part of the construction closeout process. The construction contract requires the contractor to meet with the architect, engineer, and owner's representatives at the end of the one-year warranty period to assess the status of all systems and perform corrective measures as required. These assessments review educational adequacy, function, safety, efficiency, and improvements for new facilities.

However, the district is not using this best practice because it does not perform comprehensive evaluations at three-year and five-year points to collect information about building operation and performance. Because of the lack of post occupancy evaluations, the district does not have data to determine whether:

- the facility is used as intended and operating costs are minimized;

- the end product met specifications and that the district received the product desired; and

- the district still needs the product it built.

Formal post occupancy evaluations would also enable the district to

- provide the architect with corrective feedback to be used in the next building cycle;

- ensure any needed changes are made to the district's construction planning process for future facility construction;

- minimize future costs by eliminating equipment that requires more upkeep or that is not as efficient as anticipated; and

- ensure its objectives are accomplished in the most efficient manner.

Action Plan 7-1

We recommend that the district develop a post-occupancy evaluation and apply this evaluation to all major projects.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop procedures to ensure that post occupancy evaluations occur at one year, three year, and five year intervals. These procedures should include evaluations of educational adequacy, function, safety, efficiency, and suggestions for future improvement.
	Step 2.	Contact the Department of Education Educational Facilities office for guidelines, sample post-occupancy evaluation surveys, and related information. Use this guidance to develop the district's post occupancy evaluation that includes:
		• An analysis of educational program improvements for consideration by future educational specification committees,
		• An operational cost analysis,
		• A comparison of the finished product with the educational and construction specifications,
		• Recommendations for future changes.
Who Is Responsible	Deputy Superintendent for Planning, Budgeting, and Systems Accountability, Executive Director of Facilities	
Time Frame	June 2004	

Best Practice 23: Not Using

The district does not have an established and implemented accountability system 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.

The Alachua County School District reviews program performance during the strategic planning update meetings, implementation of the five-year work plan, and at each construction stage of active projects. However, the district is not using this best practice because it does not have accountability mechanisms to ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of major aspects of its construction program. These mechanisms are essential for the district to improve its facilities construction program. Accountability mechanisms will ensure that the district builds facilities in locations that best meet district needs. They can also ensure that the district builds in the most cost effective manner. The process to establish accountability mechanisms needs to include, at a minimum:

- developed goals and objectives designed to improve the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the district's construction program;

- developed performance benchmarks and cost-efficiency measures, including comparisons to similar adjoining districts, to evaluate the program and use these tools to improve management decision-making;

- established procedures to evaluate the performance and cost of the program, to analyze the data to recognize potential cost savings, and to consider the implementation of alternatives, such as outside contracting and privatization

- implemented strategies that continually assess the reliability of program performance and cost data.

We recommend that the district establish a performance accountability system that can be use to determine whether construction projects are completed efficiently and effectively. Action Plan 3-1 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Best Practice 24: Not Using

The district does not regularly evaluate facilities construction operations based on established benchmarks which are used to implement 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 Alachua County School District updates the strategic plan semi-annually to approve the budget and capital outlay. However, the district is not using this best practice because it lacks goals, objectives,

performance measures (Best Practice 23 in this chapter) and benchmarks which would enable it to comprehensively assess the performance of its construction program and to systematically identify possible improvements to the planning process or implement cost saving measures. In addition, the district has not:

- identified analytical measures of construction, maintenance and operations costs;

- determined improvements needed in the construction planning process, based on analysis of construction, maintenance and operations costs;

- implemented cost saving actions for consistent district-wide use; nor

- executed changes to generate documented cost savings.

As a result the district has not been able to recognize any potential cost savings or cost avoidance. Refer to Action Plan 3-1 which includes the steps needed to address this issue.

8 Facilities Maintenance

Summary

The district is using 11 of the 22 facilities maintenance best practices. The district regularly reviews the organizational structure of its maintenance department, has qualified staff, and district policies and procedures address facilities' health and safety conditions. In addition, budget expenditures comply with spending requirements, costs for large repairs are accurately projected, purchases are cost effective, and the district has a system to prioritize maintenance needs. To use the remaining best practice standards and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its facilities maintenance services, the district should develop an accountability system that establishes department goals and objectives to assess performance efficiency, solicit customer feedback on service effectiveness, establish work and employee performance standards, improve efforts to prioritize backlog work by using a needs assessment, ensure employees can training and staff development, ensure that reserve funds for unexpected expenses are available, develop a preventive maintenance plan, institute an energy management system, assess privatization opportunities, and increase management efforts to ensure productivity.

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

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

Best Practice Number	Fiscal Impact: Savings					
	Year 2003-04	Year 2004-05	Year 2005-06	Year 2006-07	Year 2007-08	Total
15 Improve energy management practices	$229,800	$229,800	$229,800	$229,800	$229,800	$1,149,000

Background

The facilities department provides planning, design, construction, and maintenance services for 24 elementary schools, 8 middle schools, 7 high schools, 6 other type schools, and 6 ancillary support facilities throughout Alachua County.

Managing educational facility physical plants involves three major areas: building and equipment maintenance, custodial operations, and grounds maintenance. Building and equipment maintenance includes maintaining and operating an educational facility's mechanical, electrical, structural, technical, and life safety systems. This function also addresses individual building components, such as walls, roofs, windows, doors, ceilings, and floors. Custodial operations, includes cleaning and vacuuming, trash disposal, minor maintenance, light bulb replacement, replenishing supplies, and a variety of other general housekeeping duties for general classroom spaces, specialized instructional spaces (e.g., library, media center, cafeteria), other ancillary spaces, and auxiliary facilities. Grounds maintenance focuses on the maintenance of sports/athletic fields, playgrounds, parking lots, lawns, plazas, and water features.

The district's schools contain approximately 4.8 million net square feet and serve 27,638 students classified under the capital outlay full-time equivalents (COFTE) category for approximately 175 square feet per COFTE. [1] As shown in Exhibit 8-2, the district's square foot per COFTE ratio is higher than the 147 square feet per COFTE average in the peer districts.

Exhibit 8-2
Square Feet Per Student Is Higher Than Peer Districts

School District	Total Net Square Feet	Total Capital Outlay FTEs	Net Square Feet Per Capital Outlay FTE
Alachua	**4,833,460**	**27,638**	**175**
Bay	3,864,541	25,353	152
Collier	4,885,933	34,129	143
Lake	4,460,457	28,966	154
Marion	5,451,819	38,377	144
St. Lucie	4,241,639	28,722	148
Peer District Average	**4,580,878**	**31,109**	**147**

Source: Florida Inventory of School Houses, last updated April 2002.

According to 2001-02 data published by the Department of Education, Office of Educational Facilities, compared to its peer districts the district ranks third in cost-efficient operations at $3.69 per gross square foot, for plant maintenance and operation, which is equal to the peer average (Exhibit 8-3).

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[1].COFTE, or Capital Outlay Full-Time Equivalent, is a subset of the regular student enrollment that does not include students that don't require school space, such as charter school students (unless the charter is district-owned conversion charter), students in juvenile justice programs, homebound, etc.

Exhibit 8-3
**Alachua Total Maintenance and Operation Costs Are Consistent With Its Peer Average**

School District	Gross Square Feet	Maintenance of Plant	Operation of Plant	Total Maintenance and Operations Costs	Total Cost Per Gross Square Foot
Alachua	5,117,433	$4,457,106	$14,428,047	$18,885,153	$3.69
Bay	4,274,946	4,181,905	10,302,057	14,483,962	3.38
Collier	5,214,741	2,977,707	16,752,547	19,730,254	3.78
Lake	4,987,891	4,615,070	11,448,540	16,063,610	3.22
Marion	5,824,635	5,872,213	15,670,075	21,542,288	3.70
St. Lucie	4,516,493	4,187,795	15,344,639	19,532,434	4.32
Peer District Ave.	4,963,741	4,366,938	13,903,572	18,726,510	3.68
State Average	5,102,072	$6,995,632	$16,685,834	$23,681,465	$4.64

Source: DOE, Office of Educational Facilities, 2001-02.

Program organization

The program lines of authority are typical for most small district maintenance programs. As shown in Exhibit 8-4, the director works for the district's executive director of facilities and transportation and supervises the maintenance services manager.

Exhibit 8-4
Maintenance Department Organizational Chart Effective July 2003
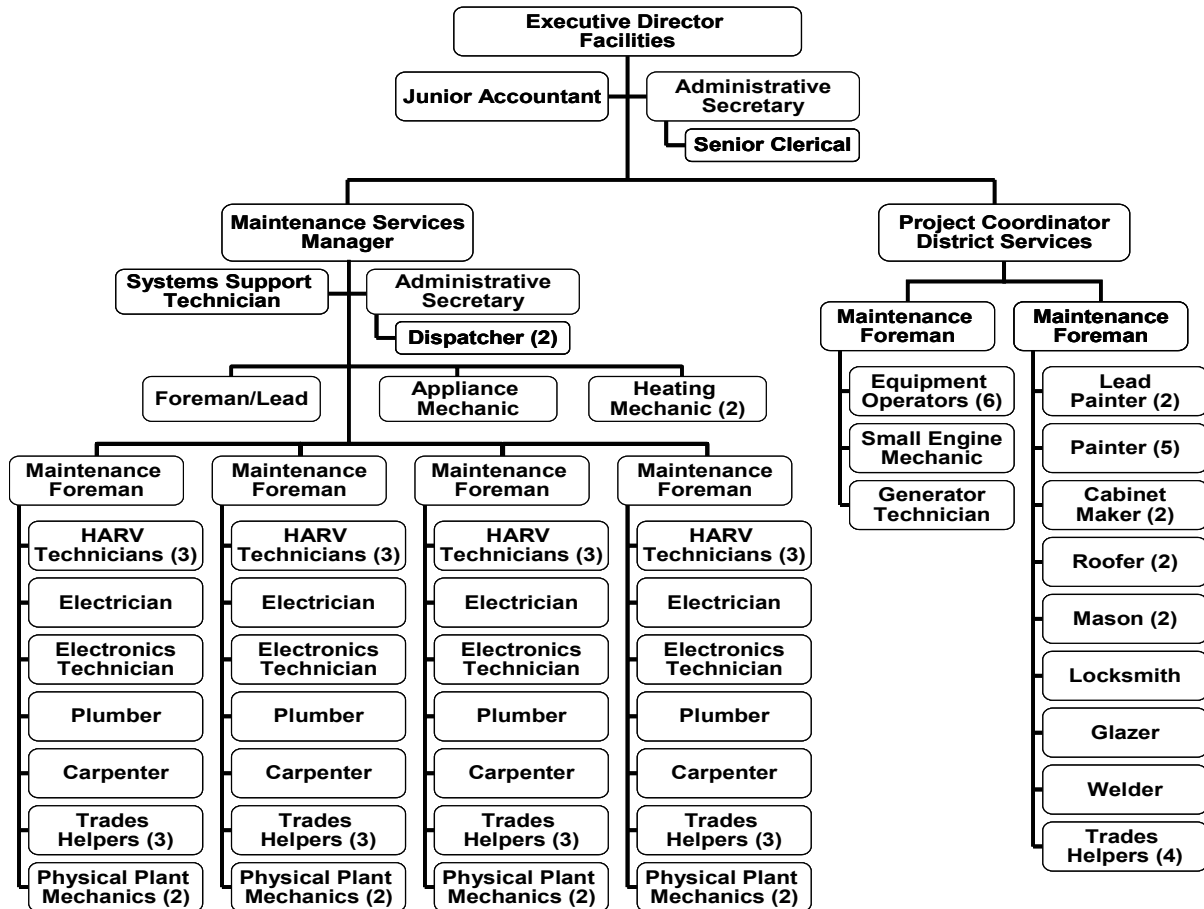
Source: Alachua County School District, 2003.

Exhibit 8-5 presents maintenance staffing levels for Alachua and its peer districts. The school district's square feet per maintenance staff is 50,668, versus the peer district average of 53,205 (excluding Marion County).

Exhibit 8-5
Alachua's Maintenance Staffing Level is Comparable to its Peer Average

District	Gross Square Feet	Total Maintenance Staff	Square Feet Per Maintenance Staff
Alachua	5,117,433	101	50,668
Bay	4,274,946	96	44,531
Collier	5,214,741	132	39,506
Lake	4,987,891	67	74,446
Marion	5,824,635	NA	NA
St. Lucie	4,516,493	62	72,847
Peer Average[1]	18,994,071	357	53,205

[1] Excludes Marion County from the calculation.

Source: Florida Department of Education, Florida Inventory of School Houses, 2001-02, and ValienteHernandez, PA calculations.

Exhibit 8-6 shows the Capital Outlay FTE, net square feet, and the average age of facilities for Alachua County School District and its peer districts.

Exhibit 8-6
On Average, Alachua's Facilities Are Older Than Its Peers

Districts	Capital Outlay FTE)	Total Net Square Feet	Average Age of Facilities
Alachua	27,638	4,833,460	28
Bay	25,353	3,864,541	24
Collier	34,129	4,885,933	19
Lake	28,966	4,460,457	25
Marion	38,377	5,451,819	24
St. Lucie	28,722	4,241,639	18

Source: Florida Inventory of School Houses, as of April 2002.

Conclusion and Recommendations —————

Summary of Conclusions for Facilities Construction Best Practices

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

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
	17. District personnel regularly review maintenance and operation's costs and services and evaluate the potential for outside contracting and privatization.	No	8-23
Information Management	18. A computerized control and tracking system is used to accurately track work orders and inventory.	No	8-24
	19. The maintenance and operations department has a system for prioritizing maintenance needs uniformly throughout the district.	Yes	8-25
	20. District policies and procedures clearly address the health and safety conditions of facilities.	Yes	8-26
	21. The school district complies with federal and state regulatory mandates regarding facility health and safety conditions.	Yes	8-27
	22. The district is aware of and prepared for the permitting and inspection requirements of the Florida Building Code.	Yes	8-27

PROGRAM DIRECTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Best Practice 1: Not Using

The district's maintenance and operations department has a mission statement that is established in writing but lacks established goals and objectives.

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

The Alachua County School District maintenance department has the following mission statement that reflects the unique goals and challenges facing the department:

> *"The mission of the Maintenance Services section is to ensure that each school's environment is maintained at the highest level possible.*
>
> *The responsibility of each employee will be to utilize their technical abilities and resourcefulness, working together as a team to respond to the maintenance needs of all Alachua County District Facilities.*
>
> *The Maintenance Services teams have a vital role in the everyday operation of education in order that students, teachers and fellow employees may be assured that the classrooms and work sites are safe and well maintained."*

To develop the mission statement, the district gathered input from team members. The mission statement is posted in the facilities department conference room and is shared with employees during new-hire orientation.

However, the district is not using this best practice because it does not have clearly stated goals and measurable objectives.   The district should develop goals and objectives for its maintenance function. These goals should reflect priorities of the maintenance department and should recognize future workforce needs, the amount and types of equipment required, and anticipated long-term budget requirements. In developing its maintenance goals and objectives, the district should consider:

- integrating the maintenance and operations plans with the district strategic plan;
- introducing innovative approaches for improved asset management;
- determining alternative methods for financing building maintenance, equipment purchases, and staffing needs;
- identifying methods to increase productivity and decrease costs;
- developing strategies that improve customer satisfaction;
- considering alternative service delivery systems; and
- recognizing innovative methods and practices, and technological advancements that would allow for increased productivity and reduced operating costs.

This final document should be submitted to the superintendent and school board for review and approval. Action Plan 3-1 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

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 costs per square foot (including energy use), full-time staff per square foot of facility, and costs per student. As part of its accountability system a district also should establish and implement strategies to continually assess the reliability of program performance and cost data. In addition, school board members should periodically receive performance information that helps them assess the efficiency and effectiveness of its maintenance program.

The Alachua County School District's Maintenance Department operates on a daily electronic work order system, which is used to some extent to evaluate the performance of all maintenance work. Each week a full work order report by location is generated and reviewed by each foreman and manager and while the district uses skilled estimates and historical data to evaluate work performance, the work order system has limitations (see Best Practice 18 of this chapter) and the evaluation process is not formalized.

The district is not using this best practice because the Maintenance Department lacks a comprehensive accountability system. Based on existing data resources, department priorities, goals, and objectives, the district should select performance measures that will reflect the success of the maintenance department. Exhibit 3-4 in Chapter 3, Performance Accountability lists possible measures the district could consider. Once selected, the district should monitor performance against these measures. Chapter 3, Performance Accountability lists suggested accountability measures and Action Plan 3-1 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Best Practice 3: Not Using

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

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

The Alachua County School District only receives feedback through the work order process and complaints. The district does not obtain and use customer feedback to determine strengths and weaknesses of the maintenance department service, to identify major maintenance needs, or to improve performance and productivity.

Surveys let district staff and community members express their opinions, perceptions, and concerns. The maintenance function could use this feedback to identify operational improvements and to enhance

customer service. For example, if feedback suggests that delayed repairs negatively affect school activities, management could investigate the matter in more detail and make necessary corrections. Surveys should include all stakeholders: teachers, students, parents, and community members. Action Plan 8-1 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Action Plan 8-1

We recommend that the maintenance department annually survey customers.	
Action Needed	Step 1. Develop survey instrument with input from maintenance staff.
	Step 2. Include questions relating to quality, timeliness, and cost of service.
	Step 3. Survey principals and a random sample of teachers, students, parents and community members.
	Step 4. Summarize and evaluate responses.
	Step 5. Use results to evaluate the use of maintenance resources and make any needed adjustments.
Who Is Responsible	Deputy superintendent of planning, budgeting and systems accountability; and executive director of facilities
Time Frame	November 2003

Best Practice 4: Not Using

The district has not established procedures and staff performance standards to ensure efficient operations.

Up-to-date procedures, when coupled with appropriate district policies, ensure that activities are carried out in an efficient and effective manner and that districts are in compliance with federal and state laws. In addition, written procedures serve as a district's institutional memory for key processes and as such help to minimize disruption to essential services and reduce the need for costly training and assistance due to staff turnover. Program management should develop written procedures and employee performance standards with input from maintenance managers, trade and custodial employees, and human resource professionals. Procedures and employee performance 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 Alachua County School District has not developed procedure and employee performance standards based on appropriate industry standards. This includes work standards, quality levels, completion schedules, and other job standards. Currently, the department relies on supervisory personnel (leads, foremen, and managers) to communicate expectations to subordinates.

The district should establish employee procedures and standards for maintaining facilities and equipment that maximize their useful lives. Using these procedures and standards will help the district ensure that maintenance efforts are organized and implemented in an efficient and effective manner. School district's that apply maintenance procedures and standards tend to experience lower maintenance and equipment replacement costs. The district has started to review Department of Education standard guidelines against district policies, practices and procedures. [2] Department of Education guidelines describe acceptable and effective maintenance and operations management practices and current standards for educational facilities. These guidelines include engineered performance standards (EPS) that can be used to measure productivity, improve scheduling for work orders and repetitive tasks, provide a basis for evaluating employee performance, and improve budgeting. However, as of May 2003, no specific program changes

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[2] *Maintenance and Operations Administrative Guidelines for School District and Community Colleges Goals and Objectives of Maintenance Program, Florida Department of Education,* June 2001.

were implemented. Examples of maintenance and operations effectiveness standards provided in the guidelines are shown in Exhibit 8-7, and Action Plan 8-2 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Exhibit 8-7
Maintenance and Operations Department Effectiveness Standards

Standard	Reference Measures
Adequate levels of maintenance	Did the department provide maintenance, custodial, and grounds services that were adequate to meet board, administration, and the general public's expectations?
Improved facility conditions	Did the department provide services that resulted in improved or enhanced conditions?
Cost effectiveness	Did the department conduct maintenance and operations activities in a cost effective manner?
Strategic plan implementation	Did the department develop and implement a strategic plan aimed at defining and addressing facility needs, shortcomings, and deficiencies in the years to come?
Cost-saving measures	Did the department implement measures to contain or reduce costs in certain areas of operation?
Educational support	How much and what types of services did the department provide that were in direct support of the educational process?
Overall effectiveness	Did the department achieve a level of effectiveness that is reflected in customer attitudes and perceptions?

Source: Florida Department of Education, Maintenance and Operations Administrative Guidelines for School Districts and Community Colleges, Measuring Departmental Effectiveness, Figure 6.5, 2001.

Action Plan 8-2

We recommend that the district develop work standards for maintenance and custodial staff.	
Action Needed	Step 1. Work with district staff to determine appropriate facility standards for district facilities that may include: • frequency of task; • duration of task; • materials cost of task; • labor cost of task; and • comparisons to applicable professional standards and peer districts. Step 2. Develop maintenance and operations criteria for the facility standards below. • Safety – environmental and occupational risks • Sanitation – frequency of cleaning • Security – protection of occupants and property • Functional performance – operating efficiently and economically • Physical condition – sound condition • Appearance – desired level of appearance Step 3. Present standards and maintenance criteria to the superintendent for approval. Step 4. Research appropriate sources, as needed, to prepare standards. Step 5. Inform maintenance and custodial personnel of the work standards. Step 6. Track the implementation of work standards and how employees meet those standards. Step 7. Evaluate employee performance based on the standards.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Facilities, Director of Personnel Services, Manager of Facilities Maintenance, key hourly employees
Time Frame	December 2003

Best Practice 5: Not Using

The department does not consistently maintain educational and district support facilities in a condition that enhances student learning and facilitates employee productivity

Comprehensive maintenance of the physical plant is critical to sustaining a suitable environment for teaching and student learning and to extending the useful life of a facility. Facilities should be maintained in a condition that supports efficient operation, maximum utilization, and provides appropriate working conditions for district employees. The district 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 Alachua County School District's Maintenance Department identifies maintenance needs through an educational plant survey, annual inspections, and input from district staff. During the 2001-02 school year the department completed approximately 10,000 work orders but nonetheless, the district has a significant backlog of maintenance tasks with approximately 800 open work orders as of May 2003.

However, the district is not using this best practice because building maintenance could be improved. Consultant visits to schools throughout the district, indicated that while building interiors were generally clean and well maintained, building exteriors showed visible signs of wear and tear, including peeling paint, rust and watermarks and unkempt grounds. In addition, a few teachers reported that maintenance requests were not addressed in a timely manner, including roofs leaks, classroom lights removed for an extended time for repair, broken bathrooms, and holes in the floors of relocateable classrooms.

To reduce the work order backlog and minimize costs from other outstanding repair needs, we recommend the district conduct a needs assessment to prioritize work orders and assist the district in addressing maintenance needs in a more timely and efficient manner. Action Plan 8-3 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Action Plan 8-3

We recommend that the district conduct a needs assessment and use this information to prioritize work orders		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Analyze the existing list of outstanding facility improvements.
	Step 2.	Use this information, along with department goals, objectives and maintenance standards developed in Action Plans 3-1 and 8-2 to project manpower, budget, and equipment needs to complete the necessary facility improvements.
	Step 3.	Incorporate the results of the stakeholder survey described in Action Plan 8-1.
	Step 4.	Prioritize maintenance needs identified in the previous steps, and incorporate these plans into the strategic plan and annual goals and objectives, as described Action Plans 3-1.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Facilities and Manager of Facilities Maintenance.	
Time Frame	March 2004	

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, educating students. This requires districts to make the most effective use of funds allocated for

administrative services, such as facilities maintenance. There is no "one" right way to organize and staff the facilities maintenance program. Critical factors that affect the structure of the maintenance organization include the number, ages, general condition, size (gross square feet), geographic distribution of a district's physical facilities, and the scope of services that have been assigned to the department. In general, however, the organizational structure of the maintenance function should be relatively flat with appropriate spans of control. Such a structure will result in minimized administrative and managerial costs while providing sufficient managerial controls to ensure operations are properly carried out. Staffing needs to be to the level by which needed work is accomplished in an economical and efficient manner. It is expected in smaller districts with fewer staff will require staff to individually handle multiple areas of responsibility (such as facilities maintenance and transportation) that may be done by different individuals in larger districts.

The Alachua County School District's Facilities Maintenance Department is well organized. As of February 2003, there were 101 positions with 16 vacancies. Effective July 2003, following the district's reorganization, the maintenance department's staffing was reduced by 9 positions. Exhibit 8-8 presents the staffing for maintenance departments for Alachua and its peers for the 2001-02 school year. Department staff is assigned to one of four geographical areas with some personnel assigned to countywide positions. A physical plant mechanic is assigned to each high school and to the larger middle schools for a total of nine positions. The district periodically reviews the staffing of every department to ensure the most cost effective organization.

Exhibit 8-8
Maintenance Staffing By Trade for Alachua and Its Peer Districts

	Alachua	Bay	Collier	Lake	Marion	St. Lucie
Air Conditioning	12	8	11	13	19	11
Carpenter	6	8	6	1	18	10
Electrician	4	7	8	9	9	6
Equipment Operator	6	2	-	-	2	3
Grounds	-	-	11	-	14	-
Maintenance mechanic	7	4	9	-	9	10
Mason	2	1	-	1	-	-
Painter	9	7	9	10	14	3
Plumber	4	4	5	3	7	4
Roofer	2	-	Contracted	3	-	-
Site-based maintenance	9	-	39	-	-	-
Trades Helper	15	29	16	-	36	-
Other	7	13	3	27	7	3
Total Trades	**83**	**83**	**117**	**67**	**135**	**50**
Administrative	2	2	2		1	1
Supervisory	7	4	5		11	7
Support staff	9	7	8		5	9
Total Administration and Trades	**101**	**96**	**132**	**67**	**152**	**67**

Source: Alachua School District and Peer Districts Maintenance Departments, as of March 30, 2002.

Although the district is using this best practice, the district should take additional steps to review outstanding work orders and ensure that within current staffing levels, position allocations are properly distributed. As future funding will also be limited and positions reduced, the district must carefully review its resource needs and current productivity levels. The district needs to consider the age of the facilities, preventive maintenance needs, and the current work order backlog when reviewing the maintenance staffing requirements. Ensuring the adequate and equitable allocation of staff resources will help the district meet its most pressing maintenance demands.

> **We recommend that the district review work orders to determine whether adjustments to staffing assignments could improve the district's ability to address current workload.**

Best Practice 7: Using

Complete job descriptions and appropriate hiring and retention practices ensure that the maintenance and operations department 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 Alachua County School District has well-developed job descriptions and has appropriate hiring and retention practices to ensure qualified staff are available. The district posts job vacancy notices that adequately describe job responsibilities, qualifications, and educational and professional requirements; salary and benefits; and an application process and selection criteria. All vacancies are open to internal applicants before being advertised to the general public. The personnel department pre-screens applicants.

Although the district is using this best practice, the district could improve its recruitment and hiring practices. While budget constraints and hiring freezes have curtailed hiring efforts, the district also reports it is often unable to attract qualified candidates. To attract candidates, the district should review non-traditional forms of recruitment such as internship programs and local job fairs as well as evolving methods such as Internet postings and on-line job applications. For example, the district can develop an apprenticeship program which could identify and train future employees. Apprentices serve as active team members, receive on-the-job and classroom training, and become certified in a needed trade. Apprenticeship programs improve a district's ability to recruit and maintain a qualified workforce over the long-term. In addition, entry-level employees, who can be promoted to trainers and mentors, might be more apt to remain if they know that advancement or promotion is possible. In addition, the district can participate in high school career days, showing that a maintenance position is an attractive career option that pays well, is hand-on, and provides an opportunity to learn a skill. Once interested applicants are identified, the district must emphasize the advantages it offers including an attractive benefit package, pension system, good working conditions, and year-round work.

> **We recommend that the district review nontraditional recruiting measures, analyze costs and benefits, and implement procedures to address current and future staffing needs.**

Best Practice 8: Not Using

The district does not provide a staff development program that includes appropriate training for maintenance and operations staff to enhance worker job satisfaction, efficiency, and safety.

Training ensures that school district employees understand the scope of their responsibilities and performance expectations, and serves to update skills and knowledge necessary to effectively and efficiently carry out their duties. The sophistication of the maintenance employee training plan, training methods, and documentation of training may vary according to the size of the district. However,

maintenance training should address custodial operations, grounds maintenance, and specialized trades and should be tailored to the needs of the specific function. In addition, training in maintenance related activities such as operating procedures, use of tools, proper lifting techniques, work place safety, hazardous materials handling, and emergency procedures should be required for all employees. A district can use a variety of training sources available to it including vendors and manufacturers of their supplies and equipment, contract trainers, and professional association meetings. School districts also should take advantage of free training materials and programs available through the Florida Department of Education, 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 Alachua County School District training program begins when a new employee is hired. The safety director conducts safety training for topics that pertain to all employees (i.e., blood borne pathogens) and OSHA training. The department conducts job specific training including safety training, safety hazards, vehicle safety, employee safety in hot weather, and boiler operations and maintenance. Manufacturer representatives and other vendors who supply equipment and chemicals offer training for new materials, tools, or systems or address other training needs.

However, the district is not using this best practice for two reasons. First, the district's maintenance training program is not comprehensive and lacks several key features, which are described below.

- The district does not have an apprenticeship program. These programs effectively identify and train future employees and improve the district's ability to recruit and maintain a qualified workforce over the long-term. A workforce development program for trades could be added to the Academy of Construction in the school district.

- The district does not have a professional development program for trades personnel. While the maintenance foremen obtain input from staff and vendors regarding needed skill development, they do not work with the human resources department to ensure the district has a planned, sequential program for professional skill development. The human resources department, which is responsible for coordinating all district training, should be involved in developing and refining maintenance training programs. This department also has the technical skills and resources to identify and fill training needs.

- The district does not have written training goals for the maintenance and operations staff. These goals help establish the training program's purpose and should identify how the training will improve employee performance. Goals should be shared with supervisors and staff so they are aware of their specific training responsibilities.

- Additionally, staff does not receive training in interpersonal team skills, time management, or district policy awareness. Since maintenance is a customer service function, personal interaction is a major component of the job and all maintenance employees should receive this type of training.

The district should develop a comprehensive training program for maintenance staff covering job skills, safety, efficiency, work habits, and district policies. The district should also develop an apprenticeship program for its trade staff. Action Plan 8-4 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Action Plan 8-4

We recommend that the district develop a comprehensive training program and an apprenticeship program.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop a systematic way of identifying training needs and establish goals for each trades position.
	Step 2.	Identify training goals and how the training will benefit the district's operations and effectiveness.
	Step 3.	Develop a program of cross training for specific positions to improve efficiency.
	Step 4.	Establish an apprenticeship program.
	Step 5.	Provide an opportunity for staff feedback and evaluation to ensure training meets their needs.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Facilities, Director of Personnel.	
Time Frame	June 2004	

Second, the district does not subscribe to trade publications or encourage membership and participation in trade organizations. Subscribing to trade publications will help the district stay abreast of industry trends. Some examples of relevant trade publications include:

- *Maintenance Solutions;*

- *Phillips Consumer Electronics;*

- *Coastal Safety Environmental;*

- *Thomas Regional Newsletter;*

- *Florida Turf Digest;* and

- *Betrock's Plant Finder.*

In addition, depending on district needs and priorities, trade organizations can offer a range of benefits. Generally, membership exposes districts and individuals to the successes and failures of similar organizations, permits conference and seminar attendance on topics of interest, lets staff share knowledge from experts and with peers, assists in locating and hiring professional talent, and fosters relationships with multiple suppliers. After determining district priorities and weighing the costs and benefits of membership, the district should join selected professional organizations, which could include:

- American Society of Heating Refrigeration and Engineering;

- Electrical Council of Florida;

- Building Code Officials of Florida;

- Florida Water and Pollution Control Operators Association;

- Florida Equipment Dealers Association;

- Florida Department of Education Trade Associations;

- Pest Control Association;

- Florida Rural Water Association; and

- Florida Rural Wastewater Association

Action Plan 8-5 includes the steps needed to subscribe to trade publications and join professional organizations.

Action Plan 8-5

We recommend that the district consider subscriptions to trade publications and encourage active membership in trade organizations, within budgetary constraints.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Obtain input regarding most useful publications including non-cost options such as electronic newsletters and other courtesy publications available to school districts.
	Step 2.	Make publications available to all departmental staff.
	Step 3.	Prioritize identified trade memberships based on district information needs, funding availability and staff interests.
	Step 4.	The district should encourage active participation any joined trade organization.
	Step 5.	Specific opportunities should be developed so that trade group participants can share information with other team members.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Facilities, Manager of Facilities Maintenance	
Time Frame	October 2003	

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 organizations, school districts have limited funds and 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, which 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 Alachua County School District has developed an annual budget with spending limits that comply with the lawful funding for each category of facilities maintenance and operations. The budget clearly outlines all expected revenues and expenditures for the district. The budget is submitted to the school board each year for approval. Once the budget is approved and implemented, the school board must approve any amendments.

However, the district lacks written goals and objectives for its maintenance department, which could improve the effectiveness of the budgeting process. Because the district does not have specific written long-term goals for maintaining and operating district facilities, budget decisions are based on immediate pressures rather than the district's strategic goals and objectives. For example, the district has not funded a preventive maintenance program, nor has it prioritized the work order backlog, or SREF repairs. Given the district's limited resources, a well conceived strategic plan that delineates the department's goals and objectives, would ensure that the district allocates its resources proactively and maximizes the use of funds toward meeting district needs.

> **We recommend that the goals and objectives developed as part of Best Practice 1 of this chapter be used to direct the budgeting process.**

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. [3] A district can do this in a number of ways. For instance, cost estimates for these projects should be developed considering experience with prior similar projects, current estimating cost standards, local market conditions, and an inflation factor for multiyear projects. A district also should be realistic in its project estimates so that once the five-year work plan is adopted, it is a valid indicator of the work that will actually be accomplished, and the dollars that will both be needed, and available, in the plan's out years.

The Alachua County School District assigns the management of most major maintenance projects to the facilities planning and construction department, while the maintenance department oversees smaller scope projects. The district bases its cost estimates on past experience with prior similar projects, current estimating cost standards and local market conditions. The department prepared estimates for 21 maintenance projects that were completed during the 2001-02 fiscal year. The projected total costs of the projects amounted to $444,472 while the actual overall costs after the projects were completed amounted to $439,275, 1.16% less than the estimates.

Best Practice 11: Not Using

The board maintains a maintenance reserve fund to handle one-time expenditures necessary to support maintenance and operations, but the amount of available funds is inadequate.

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 Alachua County School District maintains a reserve fund that may be used only in extreme circumstances. However, in the 1999-2000 fiscal year, as a result of severe budget shortfalls, the reserve fund fell to 1.9% and in 2000 and 01 and in 2001-02, it fell to less than 1% of the budget, significantly below DOE's recommended level of 3-4%. The district has taken several steps to improve its fund balance reserve which will reach approximately $1.5 million for the 2003-04 school year. These steps included hiring freezes and reorganizing the district administrative structure. While the district limited the effect of budget cuts on the classrooms, needed maintenance was deferred and reserves have not been available which could be used to manage unexpected maintenance needs. Further discussion on this issue is also presented in Chapter 2, Management Structures.

To ensure that an adequate fund balance is maintained and that planned expenditures are kept within available resources, district administration should amend its strategic plan to include a provision to maintain an unreserved fund balance between 3%-4% of operating expenditures. Action Plan 11-3 Cost Controls includes the steps needed to address this issue.

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[3] Individual projects that are beyond the scope of routine maintenance work are considered major maintenance projects.

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 Alachua County School District board policy requires the district to receive a minimum number of bids to ensure that it obtains the lowest possible cost on the goods and services purchased. However, while the district uses this best practice for initial purchases, it does not consider long term maintenance and operational costs as part of the initial purchase decision. That is, while purchase procedures ensure the lowest initial cost, operating and maintenance costs for the selected item could be significantly higher than for a competitor's item that had only a slightly higher initial cost. Thus, for major equipment purchases, the district should complete operational and maintenance cost comparisons, also called life-cycle cost analyses, as part of the initial bid process. This practice will ensure that the lowest overall cost is obtained. The district can establish a baseline for this analysis by reviewing initial prices along with operational and maintenance costs over the past two to three years, for its major equipment items.

> **We recommend that the district compare the maintenance and operational costs, in addition to initial cost, for major equipment purchases.**

Best Practice 13: Using

The district provides maintenance and operations department staff the tools and equipment required to accomplish their assigned tasks

To be efficient and effective in completing day-to-day activities, maintenance and operations employees require a wide selection of common tools and equipment. Specialty tools may be required to accomplish unplanned or unusual projects. A district should have procedures 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 daily use, but find it more cost-effective to rent less frequently used specialty tools. Some districts provide small hand tools while other districts require 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 Alachua County School District provides maintenance department personnel with the necessary tools to perform a given task. These tools are assigned to the employee and replaced when obviously broken or stolen (police report). Infrequently used or cost prohibitive tools are rented as needed. Maintenance personnel can obtain parts or materials that are not stocked on vehicles, through either the maintenance warehouse or with limited purchase orders. Stock parts and materials from the warehouse are matched against specific work orders and delivered to the maintenance employee listed on the work order. A purchase order is required for parts and materials are not available in the warehouse. Special order parts and materials received through the warehouse require two signatures on the receiving document for payment.

Although the district is using this best practice, the district does not have a schedule to replace maintenance vehicles. Half of the vehicles assigned to maintenance employees are 10 years old or older.

Many have mileage in excess of 80,000 miles and are subject to frequent breakdowns. An aging fleet which has frequent out of service days can significantly impair the department's efforts. The district should establish and adhere to a schedule for replacing these vehicles. In establishing this schedule, it should consider factors such as age, mileage, conditions, breakdowns, and expected costs to keep a vehicle operational in a safe and effective manner.

> **We recommend that the district establish and adhere to a schedule for replacing maintenance vehicles.**

Best Practice 14: Not Using

The district does not use proactive maintenance practices to reduce maintenance costs.

An effective proactive maintenance program can reduce maintenance and operations costs, reduce service outages, and extend the useful life of expensive building systems. Therefore, a district should have proactive maintenance policies that include the continuing evaluation of building systems and the costs to maintain them, the development of district-wide equipment and building system standards, preventive maintenance programs, and the surplusing of property. Evaluative information developed by the maintenance department can be used to recommend standard building systems, which are cost-efficient, for future construction projects. Standardizing equipment and building systems reduces employee training and avoids the costs of maintaining multiple parts inventories. Standards should be developed for HVAC, energy management controls, roofing, plumbing fixtures, mechanical and electrical equipment, door hardware, the security and fire alarms, and commonly used finishes such as paint, carpet, and resilient flooring. While larger districts may need a computerized preventive maintenance program to schedule and track work orders, smaller districts may find paper-based systems cost-effective and sufficient for their level of activity. In addition, school districts should have policies and procedures in place to properly identify and dispose of surplus property in the most cost-effective manner.

The Alachua County School District does not use proactive maintenance practices to reduce maintenance costs. A preventive maintenance program reduces the number and frequency of repairs and the associated costs, which include labor, parts, and downtime. Except for HVAC and boiler systems which are preventively serviced, department efforts for other mechanical equipment or structural systems are repaired "when-it-breaks". This practice is consistent with the fact that the district had 800 open work orders as of May 2003.

The district should expand its preventive maintenance program beyond the HVAC and boiler system to all operating areas. Implementing a preventive maintenance program would reduce the costs to maintain existing equipment over time. [4] Actual savings the district can realize will depend on a variety of factors, including the current condition and age of equipment, and the particular preventive maintenance activities implemented and the types of efforts used. Therefore, the total savings can not be estimated at this time. The district should conduct an analysis to determine the potential savings for selected operating areas (those with the highest potential for pay back), such as roofing, paving, flooring, and painting, and focus preventive efforts accordingly. Action Plan 8-6 provides the steps needed to address this issue.

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[4] Cost savings resulting from a preventive maintenance program are commonly estimated to be approximately 5% of maintenance expenditures from budgeted amounts over a five-year period. [E.g.: Mather, Daryl, "Calculating the Savings from Implementation of CMMS (Computerized Maintenance Management System", *Plan Maintenance Resource Center,* September 2002 http://www.plant-maintenance.com/articels/CMMS_savings.html.] However, the actual percentage that can be saved will vary depending in the preventive maintenance tasks and the age of the items being serviced.

Action Plan 8-6

We recommend that the district expand its preventive maintenance program to reduce costs.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Identify equipment and other components that will be included in a preventive maintenance program.
	Step 2.	Review equipment documentation and other material to identify the type and frequency of preventive maintenance tasks.
	Step 3.	Establish preventative maintenance teams composed of staff from each trade such as electrical, plumbing, carpentry, mechanical.
	Step 4.	Assign preventative maintenance teams on a scheduled basis to the buildings for an established period of time to work on previously submitted work orders and to assess what other needs may exist. Initially, until the backlog of work orders is pared down, the teams may stay in a high school for 5 days, a middle school for 3 days, and an elementary school for 2 days. Once the backlog of work orders is manageable, the number of days at each type of facility may be able to be adjusted.
	Step 5.	Prior knowledge of the work orders will allow the preventative maintenance team to pull together needed materials and equipment to respond to the work orders.
	Step 6.	Notify school administrators at least two weeks before scheduled visit to give them an opportunity to prepare and submit work requests. Scheduled preventative maintenance can occur during regular visit.
	Step 7.	Implement the preventative maintenance program.
Who Is Responsible	Executive director of facilities, manager of facilities maintenance	
Time Frame	October 2004	

Best Practice 15: Using

The maintenance and operations department energy costs but has not implemented strategies to contain these costs.

A comprehensive energy management plan guides a school district in ways to lower energy use and utility costs. Plan development should be a collaborative effort of district stakeholders including maintenance employees, custodians, site-based administrators, instructional personnel, 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 Alachua County School District has installed an energy accounting system to monitor energy consumption. Utility usage is entered monthly into the program. The program identifies billing errors, pinpoints costly mechanical problems, and provides information for budgeting. Exhibit 8-9 compares the school district's utility costs to peer districts. The district spends $.90 per gross square foot for utilities, as compared to a $.93 average for the peer districts and a $.94 average for the state.

Exhibit 8-9
Alachua's Utility Costs Compare Favorably to Peer Districts

District	Natural Gas	L P Gas	Electricity	Heating Oil	All Energy	Cost per Gross Square Feet
Alachua	$283,646	$141,174	$4,172,628	$ 0	$4,597,448	$ .90
Bay	500,955	11,726	3,061,545	1,974	3,576,200	.84
Collier	-	8,841	5,372,680	0	5,381,521	1.03
Lake	328,184	14,136	3,787,622	20	4,129,962	.83
Marion	153,938	97,904	4,273,533	26,160	4,551,535	.78
St. Lucie	-	120,091	5,208,479	0	5,328,570	1.18
Peer Average	327,692	50,540	4,340,772	9,385	4,593,558	.93
State Average	$182,410	$71,259	$4,520,198	$16,163	$4,788,266	$ .94

Source: Department of Education, School District Annual Utility Cost Information, 2000-01 District Financial Report.

However, the district could improve its efforts in this area in two ways. First, the district's energy management plan is outdated and should be updated. The district has communicated with utility providers, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), local industry experts, and other organizations to identify energy efficient benchmarks, but has not yet compared these benchmarks to district operations or taken steps to improve cost efficiency in targeted areas. To develop and implement a comprehensive energy plan that incorporates identified benchmarks the district should consider

- conducting an energy audit to determine ways of reducing energy consumption and cost;

- training students, teachers, administrators, and maintenance workers on energy management issues;

- developing an energy conservation checklist for students, teachers, administrators, and maintenance workers;

- developing incentive programs for schools that reward student and staff participation; and

- planning improvements to the HVAC systems.

These efforts should not only save funds, but often result in better lighting, temperature control, indoor air quality, and reduced ambient noise. To begin these activities, department personnel can reference the *Operations and Maintenance Best Practices Guide*, for information on effective operations and maintenance practices for typical systems and equipment. The guide highlights operations and maintenance practices that save an estimated 5% on energy bills without a significant capital investment. If the district can achieve this 5% savings it could realize $1,149, 000 in savings over five years. [5]

> **We recommend that the district update and revise its energy management plan, by improving the cost efficiency in targeted areas. For this purpose, the district should perform an energy audit to determine current consumption levels and costs, create energy conservation checklists, establish energy measures to be tracked by facility, and conduct energy management training for administrators, teachers, maintenance team, and students. The district should also allocate responsibility for district-wide implementation of the energy management plan and periodically review energy consumption and report findings to the board.**

Second, school personnel should fully participate in energy conservation efforts. Historically, schools were not accountable for energy management, and have not made energy and cost efficiency a priority. Principals and other school administrative staff must understand the impact that energy costs have on

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[5] This figure is based on the total utility costs, which were $4,597,448 for fiscal year 2001-02; 5% =$ 229,872 per year x 5 years = $1,149,362.

overall operating expenses. There are various ways districts can encourage energy management and school accountability.

- The district can establish an incentive program, and share the savings with schools.

- One school district transferred the budget and the responsibility of paying utility bills to individual schools. When principals and facility managers are responsible for energy costs, there is greater interested in finding ways to conserve energy.

- The district can establish concrete energy conservation strategies. Some simple strategies include turning off lights when not in use, closing doors, and keeping the thermostats at 75-78 degrees during the summer months and at 68 degrees in the winter.

> **We recommend that the district develop an incentive program for schools to promote an energy conservation program and reward schools for participating.**

Best Practice 16: Not Using

The district does not have a comprehensive energy management system 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.

In the Alachua County School District, 15 schools currently have energy management systems. These 15 schools generate monthly reports that verify the EMS system is working and to control energy usage. The systems support technician monitors these schools. Seven of these school have their energy management system fully implemented throughout the campus while the remaining eight, have an energy management system in parts or portions of the campus.

However, the district does not use this best practice because it has not identified or developed a corrective action plan to address facilities with less effective energy management systems. As described above, of the district's 45 educational facilities and additional ancillary facilities, only 15 have an energy management system and of these, 8 have a partial system in place. Many district schools were built prior to 1970. Given the changes in the educational process, buildings' ages, and other building-related advancements in the last thirty years, many of these facilities need renovation, systems upgrades, and equipment overhauls. The district's master planning process is addressing these needs, but to date has only included 18 schools. Action Plan 8-7 provides the steps the district should take to improve its energy management efforts.

Action Plan 8-7

We recommend that the district develop a corrective action plan to address facilities with ineffective energy management systems.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Use the energy audit described in Best Practice 15 of this chapter to identify facilities with opportunities to reduce energy consumption.
	Step 2.	Create and implement strategies.
	Step 3.	Periodically review consumption and update strategies as needed.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Facilities, Manager of Facilities Maintenance	
Time Frame	December 2004	

Best Practice 17: Not Using

District personnel have reviewed maintenance and operation's costs and services for some activities but do not regularly evaluate the potential for outside contracting and privatization for most maintenance functions.

Maintenance administrators should consider opportunities to privatize 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 Alachua County School District privatizes and outsources some activities performed by the maintenance function. Work is privatized or outsourced primarily because in house staff is not available or because the service is needed in an outlying location. The types of outsourced services include, but are not limited to:

- supplemental cleaning;
- HVAC filter replacement and water treatment;
- painting;
- roofing and roof repair; and
- irrigation and landscaping.

However, the district does not routinely perform a detailed cost/benefit analysis of existing activities to determine if privatization is suitable. The district should analyze each trade within the maintenance function to determine whether cost efficiencies can be accomplished by outsourcing. Factors to consider include salary, benefits, equipment purchase and maintenance, and associated transportation costs for the equipment and staff. The evaluations should be ongoing and continuous for all services. Action Plan 8-8 describes the steps the district can take to fully assess options to privatize maintenance services.

Action Plan 8-8

We recommend that the district evaluate maintenance services to determine if any are suitable for privatization or if privatization should be continued.	
Action Needed	Step 1. Identify maintenance trade functions that could be privatized.
	Step 2. Determine criteria to use in determining cost to privatize these functions.
	Step 3. Perform analysis comparing vendor cost to in-house cost.
	Step 4. Consider non-monetary variables, such as loss of district expertise or ability to react to changes in district policy and procedures, when performing this evaluation.
	Step 5. Determine feasibility of privatizing or continuing to privatize maintenance trade functions based on the results of the comparison.
	Step 6. Establish procedures to periodically perform analysis.
Who Is Responsible	Executive director of facilities, manager of facilities maintenance
Time Frame	June 2004

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Best Practice 18: Not Using
A computerized control and tracking system is not used to accurately track work orders and inventory.

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. [6] 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 Alachua County School District has a separate work order and inventory control system. The work order system tracks work order requests to each employee. Expenses associated with work are recorded manually and then entered into the system at a later time. The inventory control system contains a description of the specific inventory item, location of item, number of items currently in inventory, and unit price of each item. The system also contains a reorder point for each item. The work order and inventory control systems are not integrated. Inventory used for work orders is not necessarily entered into the inventory system, resulting in dual entry to update each data system. This is both time consuming and increases the risk for data errors.

The district is not using this best practice because work order information is not used to improve response time and efficiency. Management's ability to use its current system for this objective is limited because the system does not reliably track the time for each maintenance staff to perform specific tasks. For example, if two staff are assigned to one work order, the reported hours to complete the job may reflect the total time to complete the work (e.g. 2 hours) or the total time each individual spent (e.g. 4 hours - 2 hours for each individual). If the district establishes clear policy and guidelines for how to enter work order time when multiple individuals are assigned, the district could minimally improve the use of its work order system. For example, the district could analyze scheduled work time versus time to complete assigned work. As resources become available, the district should consider investing in a computerized maintenance work order management system. [7] An effective system ensures that all service orders, work orders, and standing operating orders are handled in an efficient and professional manner, and will allow management to accurately track the information needed to change practices, increase accountability and improve productivity. We estimate a one time cost to implement an effective web-based "off the shelf" maintenance management system is approximately $40,000. Action Plan 8-9 outlines the steps the district should take to address this issue.

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[6] 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.

[7] Should the Maintenance Department realize cost savings as a result of any changes, such as strengthening energy management or through preventive maintenance, the district should consider reallocating these resources to purchase a work order management system.

Action Plan 8-9

We recommend the district increase management efforts to use the existing work order system to improve efficiency and, as resources are available, to invest in a computerized maintenance management system that will coordinate tasks, personnel, budgets, and other functions of the maintenance department.	
Action Needed	Step 1. Establish standard criteria for tracking staff time, effort and work
	Step 2. Use the available information to the extent possible to improve efficiency and productivity,
	Step 3. Create a committee to review computerized maintenance management system options to ensure that minimum capabilities include:
	• work management capabilities;
	• physical assets management capabilities;
	• resource management capabilities;
	• extensive management reporting capabilities;
	• preventive maintenance capabilities;
	• supports regulatory compliance;
	• multiple system interface capabilities;
	• interactive method for problem resolution;
	• compatible with Microsoft windows; and
	• system support and vendor reputation.
	Step 4. As resources become available, select and install a computerized maintenance management system.
	Step 5. Use the management reporting functions of any new system to improve accountability and efficiency.
Who Is Responsible	Executive director of facilities, director of information technology, director of personnel services
Time Frame	December 2004

Best Practice 19: Using

The maintenance and operations department has a system for prioritizing maintenance needs uniformly throughout the district.

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 Alachua County School District has a system to prioritize work orders as routine, emergency, or vandalism. Routine repairs include the daily operations needed to maintain or repair facilities such as defective light switches, leaky faucets, and ceiling tile replacements. Emergency repairs address unexpected serious needs that require immediate attention, such as fire hazards or defective fire alarms, walk-in refrigerators, sewer line back-ups, HVAC systems or broken windows or locks that pose a safety and security risk. Priority to repair vandalism damages depends on the severity, danger, or amount of exposure by students, staff, and the general public.

Administrators use these categories to prioritize major maintenance services and will defer maintenance items as budget and staff resources allow. However, the district could improve its efforts in this area by creating guidelines that specifically outline the district's priorities for on-going maintenance needs. On-going maintenance priorities should be tied to educational program needs, changing enrollment projections, and long-range facility planning.

> **We recommend that the district work with school and maintenance staff to establish guidelines that list the criteria to use for setting on-going maintenance priorities and make these criteria available to all principals.**

Best Practice 20: Using

District policies and procedures clearly address the health and safety conditions of facilities.

Florida law requires school districts to develop policies and procedures establishing a comprehensive program of safety and sanitation to protect the occupants of educational facilities. [8] All districts are required to conduct annual inspections of each educational and ancillary plant to determine compliance with the sanitation and casualty safety standards prescribed in the rules of the State Board of Education. Florida law also requires that inspectors certified by the Division of State Fire Marshal conduct annual fire safety inspections. Districts should have established written health and safety standards and ensure that documented evaluations are made of the condition of each educational plant and ancillary facility. Districts should have a written plan for maintaining healthy indoor air quality, which includes monitoring of indoor air quality and corrective action plans necessary to address indoor air quality issues.

The Alachua County School District has a comprehensive safety program that provides for the safety and health of its employees and students and protects its physical facilities and environment. The district safety program complies with all applicable local, state and federal rules, regulations and procedures that address the safety and health of employees and students and the security of district facilities. The program provides for the following:

- safety requirements for employees, students, and visitors;
- loss prevention/safety training;
- work site safety inspections and committees;
- reporting of hazards, accidents or other incidents;
- security; and
- contractor safety requirements.

Maintenance staff receives additional technical and safety training, include training on safety equipment, safety hazard training, vehicle safety, employee safety in unusually hot weather, and boiler operations and maintenance. Vendors that supply the district with equipment and chemicals address other training needs.

Although the district is using this best practice, the district could improve its timeliness for correcting safety violations reported on the State Requirements for Educational Facilities (SREF) Report. The SREF report is created annually and is presented to the board for approval. The district's SREF report has 340 pages of maintenance needs, which are estimated to cost $1,180,000 to complete. Deficiencies are prioritized in the SREF report as: imminent dangerous condition; causative factors of fire, accidents, and contagion; effective egress; early detection and warning; prevention of hazardous conditions; fire protection equipment, machine guarding, personnel protection; or making facilities accessible to the

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[8] See s. 1013.12, *F.S.*

physically handicapped. Any deficiency identified as an imminent danger condition is addressed immediately; all others are corrected based on available resources. Current funding is $300,000, which is all designated to correct safety-to-life issues. As a result of such limited funds, annual facility inspection reports indicate many instances in which previously cited maintenance and safety deficiencies remained unresolved for extended periods of time. Failure to correct facility deficiencies in a timely manner results in an increased safety risks and could result in additional costs in the future. Correcting many deficiencies would require little or no corresponding cost, yet can prevent serious injury (e.g. storing chemicals under a sink at an elementary school). Up to 41% of the cited deficiencies include these types of operational issues and should be addressed in a timely manner.

> **We recommend that the district establish procedures to prioritize and systematically address SREF violations in a timely manner. Procedures could include making site-based administrators accountable for low-cost operational deficiencies and when schools consistently fail to correct violations in a timely manner, presenting this information to the school board.**

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 Alachua County School District complies with all applicable local, state and federal rules, regulations and procedures as they pertain to the safety and health of employees and students, and the security of district facilities. The program provides for the following:

- safety requirements for employees, students, and visitors
- loss prevention/safety training;
- work site safety inspections and committees;
- reporting of hazards, accidents or other incidents;
- security; and
- contractor safety requirements.

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 Alachua County School District's staff knows and understands the Florida Building Code. District staff attended a DOE regional workshop that demonstrated the difference between the Florida Building Code and the Uniform Building Code. The district has a contractual agreement with the University of Florida to address compliance. See Facilities Construction Best Practice 15 for additional information.

9 Transportation

Summary

The Alachua County School District is using 16 of the 20 transportation best practices. The district generally plans its transportation services and organizes it resources effectively, successfully acquires and maintains vehicles, operates a safe system and properly responds to emergencies or other contingencies, and effectively monitors the transportation budget. To improve operations and use the remaining best practice standards, and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its transportation services, the district must implement an accountability system based on measurable goals and objectives, improve technological and computer support for maintenance operations, improve training programs for its maintenance staff, and research privatization and collaborative agreements within the community.

As seen in Exhibit 9-1, the district has several opportunities to reduce costs and increase revenues in this area. Determining whether to take advantage of these opportunities is a district decision and should be based on many factors including district needs, public input, and school board priorities. If the district implements these action plans, it would be able to redirect the funds to other priorities, such as putting more money into the classroom or addressing deficiencies identified in this report.

Exhibit 9-1
Our Review Identified Several Ways the District Could Reduce Costs
and Increase Revenues in the Area of Transportation

Best Practice Number	Fiscal Impact: Savings					
	Year 2002-03	Year 2002-04	Year 2004-05	Year 2005-06	Year 2006-07	Total
3 Minimize the bus transportation of students living within two miles of their school who can safely walk to school	$30,000	$30,000	$30,000	$30,000	$30,000	$150,000
12 Register as a warranty center to reduce "unproductive" maintenance time	7,700	7,700	7,700	7,700	7,700	38,500
13 Charge the full cost for activity trips to schools	12,440	12,440	12,440	12,440	12,440	62,200
14 Develop a procedure to ensure that Medicaid reimbursement for qualifying students' transportation are collected	12,702	12,702	12,702	12,702	12,702	63,510
Total	**$62,842**	**$62,842**	**$62,842**	**$62,842**	**$62,842**	**$314,210**

Background

Among the most important functions or responsibilities of any school district is transporting children. Each day during the school year, the district's buses move thousands of students from towns, cities, and rural areas to and from school. The primary mission of the Alachua County School District's Transportation Department is to transport all qualified students to school and to return them to their point of origin or other designated location in a timely, safe, and cost-effective manner. This is accomplished by maintaining a fleet of buses, employing, training, and supervising bus drivers and attendants, ensuring that bus routes are efficient and that buses ride on time, reducing and eliminating vehicle breakdowns, enforcing accident prevention and safety programs, ensuring that special requirements are responded to in a timely manner, and providing successful staff support of the transportation mission.

The district's student enrollment for 2001-02 was 29,662 and the Transportation Department provides bus service to 15,120 students attending 39 schools, and 6 other special and adult educational facilities. Though a majority of students live in Gainesville or in smaller suburbs, there are a significant number of students who reside in rural areas of the county. The Transportation Department carries regular and Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students and must meet and resolve myriad challenges to accomplish its mission.

With a current budget over $8 million, the Transportation Department has 204 buses and approximately 218 bus drivers. Current estimates project that buses in the district will travel over 5 million miles in transporting students during the 2002-03 school year. The transportation function is conducted from a central facility. Four additional sites provide bus compounds and fueling sites. The Transportation Department maintains 203 buses and 90 district support vehicles.

Florida Law requires school districts to provide student transportation. The state helps the district fulfill this mandate by providing transportation funding to the following groups of students:

- students who live two or more miles from their school;

- elementary school students (sixth grade and under) who live within two miles of their school but would be required to walk in hazardous conditions (defined by state) to attend school;

- students with disabilities;

- participants in teenage parent programs; and

- special education, vocational, and dual enrollment students transported from one school to another.

Transportation costs for other students (courtesy riders), extracurricular trips, and costs that exceed state allotment are paid with district funds. The state allocates student transportation funding to school districts based on a set formula. The formula makes adjustments for

- the Florida Price Level Index which is generated from the measure of a "market basket" of goods and services in each of the 67 Florida counties;

- a Bus Occupancy Index that rewards districts having higher load factors (students per bus); and

- a Rurality Index derived from the Florida Statistical Abstract which adjusts a district's funding based on the number of rural inhabitants and downwards based on the number of urban inhabitants.

Exhibit 9-2 represents selected student transportation data for the district and five peer districts for the 2000-01 school year. Several conclusions that may be drawn from this data, as outlined below.

- Slightly more than half of the students in the district (15,120 of 29,662, or 50.4%) required student transportation services. This percentage ranks midrange compared with five peer districts which range from 40.8% to 70.6%.

- Although the number of students transported by the district was midrange compared to its peers, the district used significantly fewer buses and drove the third most miles compared to its peers. The ratio of school centers to number of buses serving the district was 3.72, which was the lowest when compared to the peer districts' range from 3.94 to 8.24. This difference is due, in large part, to the effective and innovative routing practices implemented by the district.

- Student transportation staff as a percentage of all district staff was 7.51%, which was second lowest when compared to the peer districts which range from 6.59% to 11.23%.

- Student transportation expenditures as a percentage of all district expenditures are 5.81%, which was midrange when compared with the five peer districts' which range from 4.13% to 7.17%.

- The district has the second highest percentage of its transportation cost funded by the state as compared to peer districts, primarily because of the impact that the district's high bus occupancy has in the state funding formula calculations. As the table shows, 70.86% of transportation costs are funded by the state, which was the second highest percentage when compared to the five peer districts which range from 50.62% to 91.97%.

- The district's annualized per-mile operating expenditures were $1.62, which ranked it the lowest compared with the five peer districts which range from $1.75 to $2.43.

Exhibit 9-2
Comparative Student Transportation Data
For Alachua County School District and Five Peer Districts for 2000-01

Measure	Alachua	Bay	Collier	Lake	Marion	St. Lucie
Square Miles	902	758	1,994	954	1,610	581
Number of Students Enrolled	29,662	25,752	34,199	29,290	38,555	29,538
Number of Students Transported	15,120	10,498	16,161	16,814	22,849	20.862
Percentage of Students Transported	50.4%	40.8%	47.3%	57.4%	59.3%	70.6%
Number of School Centers Served	44	36	44	43	48	38
Number of Buses (Daily Service)	2001-180 (2002–164)	142	233	200	380	313
Ratio of number of school centers to number of school buses	3.72	3.94	5.30	4.65	7.92	8.24
Number of Annual Route Miles	4,621,287	2,516,050	4,698,360	4,129,650	8,385,013	6,363,900
Average bus occupancy	85.00	73.93	69.36	84.28	60.13	66.76
Number of Student Transportation Staff	297	213	386	308	580	440
Total of all District Staff	3,954	3,234	4,168	3,337	5,166	4,060
Percentage of Student Transportation Staff	7.51%	6.59%	9.26%	9.23%	11.23%	10.84%
State Allocation	$6,341,886	$4,069,725	$6,117,993	$7,251,067	$9,482,167	$7,699,462
Percentage of Student Transportation Funding by State	70.86%	67.34%	50.62%	91.97%	63.34%	64.67%
Student Transportation Operating Expenditures	$7,970,595	$6,043,769	$12,086,254	$7,883,782	$14,969,616	$11,905,371
Student Transportation Operating Expenditures per Annual Mile	$1.62	$2.38	$2.43	$1.83	$1.75	$1.80
Bus Purchases	$2,509,296	$420,923	$1,734,779	$1,216,355	$1,699,692	$935,137
All District Expenditures	$180,359,130	$156,493,194	$234,076,961	$163,701,777	$226,997,072	$179,150,819
Total Student Transportation Expenditure as a Percentage of Total District Expenditures	5.81%	4.13%	5.90%	5.56%	7.34%	7.17%
Student Transportation Expenditures Per Student	$677	$610	$829	$540	$718	$615

Source: *Q-Link: Florida School District Transportation Profiles* 2002, for 2000-2001, DOE; ValienteHernandez P.A. calculations.

Program organization

The program lines of authority are typical for most medium-sized district student transportation operations. The director of transportation reports to the executive director of facilities and transportation. As illustrated in Exhibit 9-3, student transportation is under the supervision of the director of transportation. His primary assistant is the manager of operations. A route coordinator and other key staff members provide valuable staff assistance and support.

Dispatchers oversee daily school bus dispatch, monitor bus routes, respond to and coordinate bus operators and attendants, and communicate with schools. Additionally, substitute drivers are allocated when unexpected events occur.

Route coordinators are located at a centralized site and headed by a supervisor who oversees four route specialists. The route specialists are assigned to various geographical areas. The route specialists are responsible for planning and maintaining the department's bus routes, which includes mapping bus stops and controlling run times. Additionally, route coordinators supervise the district's 182 bus drivers and 40 attendants.

The **driver trainer's** responsibilities include hiring and training bus drivers. Additionally, the driver trainer responds to and performs accident investigations.

The **field trip specialist** coordinates all requests for activity trips, assigns drivers, and bills these services to the appropriate school accounts.

Maintenance operations are led by the maintenance manager who oversees the activities at the centralized maintenance facilities, parts and storage shop, and data entry offices. Three lead mechanics supervise a total staff complement of 20 consisting of mechanics, vehicle service specialists and auto service workers. Maintenance operations are responsible for maintaining and repairing the district's buses and support vehicles.

Exhibit 9-3
Alachua County School District Transportation Department Organization
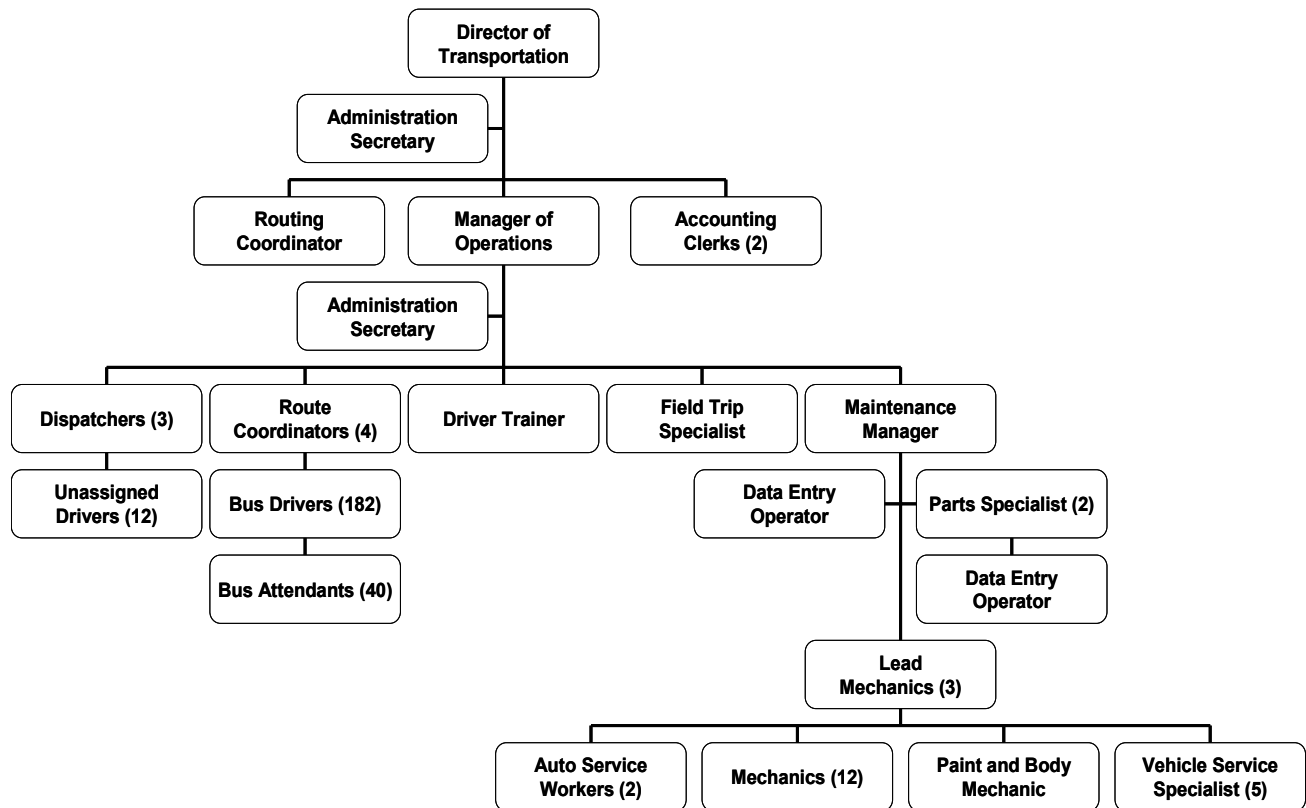
Source: Alachua County School District, 2003.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Conclusions for Transportation Best Practices

Practice Area		Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
Planning, Organization, and Staffing	1.	The district coordinates long-term planning and budgeting for student transportation within the context of district and community planning.	Yes	9-8
	2.	The district provides regular, accurate, and timely counts to the Florida Department of Education on the number of students transported as part of the Florida Education Finance Program.	Yes	9-9
	3.	The transportation office plans, reviews, and establishes bus routes and stops to provide cost-efficient student transportation services for all students who qualify for transportation.	Yes	9-9
	4.	The organizational structure and staffing levels of the district's transportation program minimize administrative layers and processes.	Yes	9-14
	5.	The district maintains an effective staffing level in the vehicle maintenance area and provides support for vehicle maintenance staff to develop its skills.	No	9-14
	6.	The district effectively and efficiently recruits and retains the bus drivers and attendants it needs.	Yes	9-16
	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	9-18
Vehicle Acquisition and Maintenance	8.	The school district has a process to ensure that sufficient vehicles are acquired economically and will be available to meet the district's current and future transportation needs.	Yes	9-19
	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	9-22
	10.	The district ensures that fuel purchases are cost-effective and that school buses and other vehicles are efficiently supplied with fuel.	Yes	9-23
	11.	The district maintains facilities that are conveniently situated to provide sufficient and secure support for vehicle maintenance and other transportation functions.	Yes	9-24
	12.	The district maintains an inventory of parts, supplies, and equipment needed to support transportation functions that balances the concerns of immediate need and inventory costs.	Yes	9-26
Operations, Management and Accountability	13.	The district ensures that all regular school bus routes and activity trips operate in accordance with established routines, and any unexpected contingencies affecting vehicle operations are handled safely and promptly.	Yes	9-27
	14.	The district provides efficient transportation services for exceptional students in a coordinated fashion that minimizes hardships to students.	Yes	9-30
	15.	The district ensures that staff acts promptly and appropriately in response to any accidents or breakdowns.	Yes	9-32

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
	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	9-33
	17. The district provides appropriate technological and computer support for transportation functions and operations.	No	9-34
	18. The district monitors the fiscal condition of transportation functions by regularly analyzing expenditures and reviewing them against the budget.	Yes	9-38
	19. The district has reviewed the prospect for privatizing transportation functions, as a whole or in part.	No	9-38
	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	9-40

PLANNING, ORGANIZING, 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.

The school district's transportation function is in a good position to know the transportation needs of the district and what priority should be assigned to these needs. The transportation function should therefore be proactive when decisions are made that 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 factual information necessary to assist the school board in making appropriate decisions. In a similar manner, the district transportation function needs to provide the school board and the public with information on the financial impact certain district decisions such as those involving staggered school start times and school choice programs will have on transportation. The district transportation function also needs to 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 negatively affect district transportation for many years.

The Alachua County School District is proactive in its planning and decision-making on student transportation issues. The district's transportation function systematically assesses transportation needs and budgets are developed in consultation with senior operational staff. This process considered all current and anticipated budget categories. Transportation staff has also conducted a risk analysis to further identify the needs and priorities of the transportation function. Subsequently, all high-risk areas have been addressed in the district's strategic plan. Transportation officials provide regular executive summaries, "strategic plan updates," on the progress of these areas to the school board.

Purchases for student transportation must adhere to requirements prescribed in the strategic plan, with references to the strategic plan coded and included on each purchase order, requisition, and invoice. Consequently, all purchases are reviewed based on whether they coincide with the district's long-term plan.

The consulting team reviewed documents and action memos and the Transportation Department's identified recommendations that effect future budgets. Transportation staff annually presents these savings to the school board. Notable areas of cost reductions that were planned and implemented by the district in the recent past include:

- using staggered school start times in outlying areas such as Alachua-High Springs, Newberry, and Hawthorne to eliminate the need for 18 bus routes and better utilize existing buses;
- transporting all grade levels together to maximize bus occupancy;
- eliminating early release days for middle school students to reduce the need for buses in daily service;
- purchasing larger capacity buses to maximize bus occupancy; and
- implementing transfer points for magnet school transportation programs.

While there is solid evidence that the Transportation Department addresses potential cost savings in budget development, costs can be further reduced. Staff is aware of potential cost savings that can be achieved by reducing the number of courtesy riders, but administrators also recognize the difficulty in eliminating a service that some parents value and may not realize is not a required service.

Transportation needs, concerns, and costs are considered in making district decisions regarding future locations of district educational programs through the active involvement of transportation staff in the

planning stages for any new school additions or assessment of physical needs such as loading areas, bus circles, etc.

Transportation administrators and district planning staff integrate district planning with other local sources. Transportation staff regularly consults with community developers regarding new housing developments, new roads, road closings, population growth, zoning changes, and business development to assess their impact on future transportation operations. Additionally, through representation in the Technical Advisory Committee of the North Central Florida Regional Planning Council and the Alachua County Traffic Safety Team, pertinent information regarding the status of roadway improvements, residential construction, need for crossing guards, and hazardous areas in the county are relayed to transportation staff.

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 in the district is the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP). Therefore, it is in the district's best financial interests to accurately count and report transportation-eligible students to the Florida Department of Education (FDOE). Accuracy is important for two reasons: the district is able to get more funds for some students such as severely disabled students than for regular students, and state auditors periodically review records and take money back from a district if the district can not justify its claims for state funds. The student counts provided by FEFP are useful to district staff in establishing trend lines for the prediction of student transportation needs.

The Alachua County School District has a systematic process to accurately count transported students. The most recent Auditor General review found that the district categorized some drivers incorrectly, and the district took immediate identifiable steps to resolve these errors and ensure future compliance.

Quality control oversight, random spot checks, and review of reports from drivers ensure that count information is correct. The district attaches school attendance records and printouts from the automated routing system to assist in the review.

Transportation administrators also use the student counts to identify trends and issues that may require a managerial or budgetary response. The transportation staff has used the student counts and comparisons to peer districts to request the elimination of transportation services to courtesy riders to the school board.

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. "Door-to-door" bus service is inherently inefficient and should be reserved for students with disabilities that require such service or students who live long distances from their nearest fellow student (such as students living in rural areas). The general rule is that the transportation system can minimize the time students have to spend on buses and save transportation dollars by using fewer but larger (more students at the bus stop) bus stops. School districts should only transport students that they are required to transport. Students living within two miles of their school that can safely walk to their schools (courtesy riders) will not receive state funding and should not be transported. Exceptions to this rule are students who need specialized exceptional student education transportation or elementary school students who would encounter hazardous walking conditions as described in statutes. The school district should attempt to minimize and alleviate hazardous walking conditions by the use of crossing guards, reduced speed limits, sidewalks, etc. School districts should

also use staggered school starting and ending times to allow efficient use of buses and drivers. Usually this means that separate bus runs will be conducted for elementary, middle, and high school students with reasonable turn-around time for the buses to get from the end of one bus run to the beginning of another.

The Alachua County School District has adopted policies and guidelines to facilitate the design of safe and cost-effective routes. These policies and guidelines include:

- authorization and guidelines for reimbursing private transportation costs for students residing in remote or inaccessible areas;

- maintaining a distance of at least a quarter mile between bus stops; and

- providing spur routes only to regular students that reside more than 1.5 miles from main routes unless hazardous conditions exist.

At the beginning of each school year or when students enter a school after the school year has begun, main routes (trunk routes) are updated as needed in response to requests from schools, parents, and ESE staff. When a request is received, route coordinators determine where the student lives in relation to current routes. After verifying the accuracy of student information, the student is assigned a pickup point along a given route for transportation to and from the assigned campus. Additional bus stops are only added after the particular area is reviewed with safety as a paramount objective. Although bus stops are not reviewed on a formal schedule, they are thoroughly reviewed once a request or complaint has been logged. All safety reviews are documented and substantiated with digital pictures of the scene that considers several factors including:

- presence and condition of local walkways;

- condition and size of the street; and

- traffic intensity in the area.

Route planning staff uses manual maps and a computerized mapping system to develop routes and determine bus stop placement. The computerized mapping system uses the district's transportation policies and guidelines to design routes and schedules with the least number of buses and the shortest travel distances while meeting the needs of the eligible student population. The system also functions as a database that maintains current information on student profiles, residences, existing bus stops and routes, mileage, expected time of travel, schools, and hazardous areas.

At the beginning of each school year, route coordinators thoroughly analyze each route by mapping the proximity of each bus stop to the student residences and main routes. Routing staff ensures that all dispatchers, bus operators, substitute bus operators, and schools receive the latest route schedules and maps. Dry runs are performed to assess the viability of the routes and these efforts are included in drivers' pay to ensure attendance. The drivers are instructed to note all conditions and proposed changes to the routes. Reasonability checks are performed on the route times, and mileages are furnished. Routing staff accompanies drivers and perform a route review if discrepancies are found.

The Transportation Department keeps a file of all current complaints or suggestions from parents, campus staff, or the general public about current or proposed bus routes or driver performance. A review of the complaint logbook and "Concern/Compliant Resolution Form" entries reveal a well-kept and updated system on complaints and suggestions. The consulting team reviewed 20 complaint resolution forms to confirm that appropriate action was taken to ensure that bus stops and routes are changed in a way that ensures the efficiency of the student transportation system.

The director of transportation and route planning staff use the complaint logs and reports as management tools to improve transportation services. They also serve as guidelines for route coordinators to improve and modify bus schedules and routes.

The district's Transportation Department is actively involved in minimizing and alleviating hazardous walking conditions through district participation in the North Central Florida Regional Planning Council

and Alachua County Traffic Safety Team (ACTST). Hazardous walking concerns are discussed and coordinated with the representative on a weekly basis during the transportation department's staff meetings. The ACTST works closely with local law enforcement to identify and eliminate hazardous walking conditions and has undertaken several projects at different school locations to eliminate hazardous walking conditions. Projects such as the "School Board / Walk Zone Evaluation Project for Chester Shell Elementary School" have actively lobbied for reduced speed limits, increased numbers of crossing guards, and installation of sidewalks in selected areas.

The district also reviews hazardous walking conditions before each state survey to identify changes to ensure the accuracy of student count information. Exhibit 9-4 presents the number of students transported due to hazardous walking conditions in the Alachua County School District and its peers. The district only transports 103 students, 0.68% of its total riders, due to hazardous walking conditions.

Exhibit 9-4
Alachua County School District Has a Small Percentage of Students
Transported Due to Hazardous Walking Conditions Compared to Its Peers

School District	Eligible Students Transported	Number of Students Transported Due to Hazardous Walking Conditions	Students Transported Due to Hazardous Walking Conditions as Percentage of Total Riders
Alachua	**15,120**	**103**	**0.68%**
Bay	10,498	0	0.00%
Collier	16,161	701	4.34%
Lake	16,813	0	0.00%
Marion	22,849	0	0.00%
St. Lucie	20,862	175	0.84%
Peer Average	**17,437**	**175**	**1.00%**

Source: Q-Link: Florida School District Transportation Profiles, 2002, for 2000-2001, DOE.

Although the district is using this best practice and has reduced the service provided to courtesy riders over the past 3 years (Exhibit 9-5), it could take additional steps to further reduce this number. [1] The district has a higher percentage and number of courtesy riders relative to its peer districts as shown in Exhibit 9-6. The number of students who are courtesy riders is 10.28%, which is 3.75% higher than the peer average of 6.53% and 4.62% higher than the state average of 5.66%.

Exhibit 9-5
Alachua County School District Has Reduced
the Number of Courtesy Riders Over the Past 3 Years

Year	Eligible Students Transported	Number of Courtesy Riders	Courtesy Riders as Percentage of Total Riders
2000-01	15,120	1,733	10.28%
1999-00	14,261	1,690	10.59%
1998-99	13,975	2,127	13.21%

Source: Q-Link: Florida School District Transportation Profiles, 2002, 2001, 2000, DOE.

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[1] As previously noted, courtesy riders include students who live within 2 miles of their school and are not faced with hazardous walking conditions. Districts do not receive state funds to transport these students.

Exhibit 9-6
Alachua County School District Has a High Number of
Courtesy Riders Compared To Its Peers and the State Average

School District	Eligible Students Transported	Number of Courtesy Riders	Courtesy Riders as Percentage of Total Riders
Alachua	15,120	1,733	10.28%
Bay	10,498	3,053	22.53%
Collier	16,161	1,029	5.98%
Lake	16,814	392	2.28%
Marion	22,849	825	3.48%
St. Lucie	20,862	398	1.87%
Peer Average	17,437	1,139	6.53%
State Average	985,684	59,192	5.66%

Source: Q-Link: Florida School District Transportation Profiles, 2002, for 2000-2001, DOE.

As part of the annual budget planning over the past years, transportation administrators have recommended eliminating service to courtesy riders as a potential district cost saving, but the school board has not supported this recommendation. Currently, the district routinely transports students living within 1.5 miles of their school and who do not have hazardous walking conditions. The Transportation Department estimates that the cost of providing this courtesy rider service is approximately $30,000 annually. Over a five-year budget cycle, this amounts to $150,000. [2] Transportation staff believes that parent objections and subsequent political pressure are the most significant obstacles to reducing or eliminating the courtesy rider program. While the review team could not verify whether this belief was founded on fact, this belief was broadly evident during discussions with managers and staff both within and outside the Transportation Department.

To minimize courtesy riders, the school board should establish written guidelines that define the criteria for transporting courtesy riders. This would include students who do not meet the state hazardous walking criteria, but who have conditions that the district considers hazardous. Other criteria, such as transporting riders on a "space available" basis, can be included. These criteria give the district flexibility to provide transportation to students considered courtesy riders, but ensures that the number of these students, and the costs to the district, is minimized. The district should continue to work with local entities to resolve safety hazards where possible, so it can discontinue busing when it is safe to do so. [3]

> **We recommend that the district continue efforts to reduce courtesy riders by establishing written guidelines that define local unsafe walking conditions and other factors that the district will consider when transporting students living within two miles of their schools and annually report to the board the costs associated with transporting courtesy riders. In addition the district should continue to work with local entities to resolve safety hazards.**

The school board has adopted staggered school start times to help its buses serve as many students as possible and maximize the district's average bus occupancy. The district continually strives to improve transportation efficiency by developing strategies to eliminate routes and the need for buses. As Exhibit 9-7 indicates, the district increased its average bus occupancy from 76 to 85 riders over school years 1998 to 2002 by using "creative routing" practices such as:

▪ a three-tiered system to transport students in densely populated areas (Gainesville center), while low populated areas (Hawthorne area) are transported on the same tier and occupy the same buses (K through12);

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[2] The use of 25 buses that can be eliminated x 180 days x 7 miles per gallon x 0.95 cents fuel cost per gallon = $29,925

[3] In May 2003, the school board voted to eliminate curtsey riders where safety is not an issue.

ValienteHernandez P.A.

- a two-tier system with either middle and high school or middle and elementary school students transported together in areas of average population such as High Springs, Alachua, Newberry, and Archer areas;

- transfer points in their countywide programs to transport students to a particular school and then transferring them to a bus that transports countywide; and

- reimbursing students that reside in remote areas for private transportation.

The review team examined existing staggered school start times and "creative routing" practices for the district and found that they were reasonable. School schedules were optimally designed while still providing service to students in a timely manner.

The district routing practices also resulted in relatively high average bus occupancy and low costs per mile and per student. As Exhibit 9-8 shows, the district's average bus occupancy, cost per mile and cost per student compares favorably with its peers. The district's average bus occupancy is 13.11 students higher than the peer average of 70.89 students, and 15.32 students higher than the state average of 68.68 students. The district's cost per mile is 31 cents lower than the peer average of $1.93 per mile, and 59 cents lower than the state average of $2.21 per mile. The district's cost per student is $36 lower than the peer average of $713 per student, and $32 lower than the state average of $709 per student. These statistics indicate the efficiency and cost effectiveness of the district's transportation operations.

Exhibit 9-7
Alachua County School District Increased Average Bus Occupancy Beginning In 2000-01

Year	Eligible Students Transported	Buses In Daily Service	Average Bus Occupancy
2001-02	15,146	178	85.09
2000-01	15,120	180	84.00
1999-00	14,261	185	77.09
1998-99	13,975	187	75
1997-98	13,898	183	76

Source: Alachua County School District; *Q-Link: Florida School District Transportation Profiles*, 2002, 2001, 2000, DOE.

Exhibit 9-8
Alachua County School District Average Bus Occupancy,
Cost Per Mile, and Cost Per Student Compares Favorably With Its Peers

School District	Average Bus Occupancy	Cost Per Mile	Cost Per Student
Alachua	84.00	$1.62	$677
Bay	73.93	$2.38	$610
Collier	69.36	$1.91	$829
Lake	84.28	$1.83	$793
Marion	60.13	$1.75	$718
St. Lucie	66.76	$1.80	$615
Peer average	70.89	$1.93	$713
State average	68.68	$2.21	$709

Source: Alachua County School District; Q-Link: Florida School District Transportation Profiles, 2002, 2001.

Best Practice 4: Using

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

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 at which needed work is accomplished in an economical and efficient manner.

The Alachua County School District periodically reviews the program's organizational structure and staffing levels. These reviews are reflected in the district's Restructure Plan for 2002-03 along with a description of the analysis performed. Additionally, over the past five years the district also had an external and internal review that included peer district comparisons of the transportation's organizational and management structure. The district has developed benchmarks based on these studies and demonstrates an appropriate organizational structure with reasonable lines of authority, spans of control, and minimized staffing levels. The district annually reports its findings through school board workshops.

Best Practice 5: Not Using

The district maintains an effective staffing level in the vehicle maintenance area, but should improve maintenance management of support vehicles and formal training efforts for maintenance staff.

Vehicle maintenance operations must constantly balance having enough staff to properly maintain vehicles while not having excessive staff, which increases costs and reduces operational efficiency. The number of vehicle maintenance staff needed can vary depending on factors such as the number of different types of buses being maintained, whether the district maintains district support vehicles ("white fleet" such as cars, trucks, and other on-road vehicles), and other district equipment such as lawn mowers and tractors. Districts need to invest resources in 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 Alachua County School District continues to review the maintenance staffing levels at regular intervals. A recent review revealed that the supervision over the maintenance function was inadequate, and subsequently a shop foreman position was eliminated and an additional lead mechanic position was created.

The district offers monetary financial incentives for maintenance staff to obtain ASE certification and to attend a 150-hour industrial mechanic course at Santa Fe Community College. For each five ASE certifications or completed course, the staff member receives a two-step pay increase, to the maximum of two increases. The district pays for all training classes, tests, and training manuals related to the ASE certification and instruction.

Although the district's staffing for maintenance complies with Department of Education (DOE) guidelines, the combined workload of the servicing the district's buses and support vehicles is problematic. The district's 221-bus-fleet is maintained by 10 maintenance staff, for a ratio of approximately 17:1. The maintenance staff and a full time auto mechanic are also responsible for servicing the district's 90 support vehicles ("white fleet"). A generally accepted staffing level for an efficient school bus maintenance operation is a bus to mechanics ratio of 20:1, and 40:1 for all other vehicles. [4] As shown in Exhibit 9-9, the staffing of the peer districts also vary considerably as the staffing is not only based on the number of vehicles but also the age and condition of buses in daily service.

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[4] These standards were developed by Charles Long of Common Sense Management, a consulting firm that focuses on school bus fleet maintenance systems

Exhibit 9-9
Alachua and Peer District Maintenance Staffing Per Vehicle Class 2001-02

School District	Number of Buses Serviced	Maintenance Staff Assigned to Buses	Ratio	Number of Support Vehicles in Daily Service	Maintenance Staff Assigned to Vehicles	Ratio
Alachua	**221**	**13**	**17:1**	**90**	**1**	**90:1**
Bay	138	9	15:1	27	1[1]	27:1
Collier	264	13	20:1	188	4[2]	47:1
Lake	215	15	14:1	218	2	109:1
Marion	380	14	27:1	300	3	100:1
St. Lucie	310	13	24:1	0	N/A	-
Peer Average	**261**	**13**	**20**	**184**	**3**	**61:1**

[1] Same staff 10% of workload.

[2] Same staff 30% of workload.

Source: Alachua County School District Transportation Department, peer district questionnaires, 2003.

Interviews conducted by the review team indicated that there is a lack of scheduling, follow-up, and maintenance of support vehicles due to the high workload of support vehicle staff and insufficient control procedures. The lack of timely service of support vehicles can lead to future problems that could be very costly to the district.

A recent DOE policy change should help resolve this problem. In April 2003, the department modified its rules to allow school districts to perform required bus maintenance inspection on a 30-day cycle instead of the current 20-day inspection cycle. This should bring workload relief to the Alachua district and help it manage servicing the district's bus and support vehicle fleets. The district should also explore the alternative of setting up a collaborative with another public entity such as Alachua County Public Works or the University of Florida, to service and repair white fleet vehicles or to outsource this service to private vendors. This research should be done after a school board representative or the superintendent has contacted these public entities in the community to request research into a collaborative effort. In order for the district to consider outsourcing support vehicle maintenance, the district should first improve the tracking of key unit cost information and perform a cost analysis of the district's maintenance operation.

Action Plan 9-1

We recommend that the district research alternatives to determine the most cost-efficient method to improve the timely servicing and repair of the district's support vehicle fleet.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Improve tracking of key unit cost information and perform a cost analysis of the district's maintenance operation.
	Step 2.	A school board representative or the superintendent should contact public entities such as the Alachua County Public Works or the University of Florida to discuss the possibility of a collaborative effort
	Step 3.	Based on this response and computed cost information, work with the entity to develop collaborative effort or explore the possibility of outsourcing this function to private vendors.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Transportation, Superintendent, and School Board	
Time Frame	March 2004	

In addition, the district is not using this best practice because it needs to strengthen its in-service training program, especially for its bus mechanics since training sessions for these staff seem to be conducted when time is available. Annual training sessions mostly focus on policies and procedures for the maintenance and transportation departments. Transportation staff acknowledges that the in-service training is not sufficient. The district indicated that training sessions were conducted informally and that

no documentation was available to substantiate the frequency and content of training sessions. A noteworthy concern is that the district does not adequately distribute technical service bulletins essential to ensure that transportation maintenance staff is properly instructed on topical issues and current concerns and the department's operating manual is not regularly updated.

Although the district indicated that they provide the opportunities for maintenance staff to attend external training courses (DOE sponsored technical classes and manufacturers classes), the review team found that with the exception of the manager of garage operations and some lead mechanics, staff seldom attend these courses. Further, due to the district's lack of a formal in-house training program, the information gained at these classes is not being appropriately relayed to other staff.

Action Plan 9-2

We recommend that the district develop and implement a training schedule for maintenance staff which includes policies and guidelines on attendance of external training sessions, in-house training curriculum, and distribution of training materials and manuals.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	The supervisor of garage operations in consultation with lead mechanics and the director of transportation formulate a formal training schedule for in-service training which should include:
		▪ communication of the district's maintenance policies and procedures;
		▪ topics of current interest and concern;
		▪ distribution of technical service bulletins;
		▪ distribution of updates to maintenance operating manual;
		▪ additional guidance to staff;
		▪ a rotation schedule for external training sessions; and
		▪ distribution and incorporation of external training information into the in-service training schedule.
	Step 2.	The supervisor of garage operations, document the training received and provide a monthly report to the director of transportation on the progress and compliance to the schedule.
	Step 3.	The director of transportation and the executive director of facilities and transportation annually present the in-service training performance to the school board.
Who Is Responsible	Supervisor of Garage Operations, Director of Transportation, Superintendent, School Board	
Time Frame	September 2004	

Best Practice 6: Using

The district effectively and efficiently recruits and retains the bus drivers and attendants it needs.

The need to recruit replacement drivers and attendants is inevitable for all school districts. Working hours (a part-time job starting early in the morning and often ending late in the day) along with challenges such as maintaining discipline while ensuring safe driving generally lead to high turnover for bus drivers and attendants. Job turnover can be addressed through retention and recruitment. Retention is the preferred way to maintain the staffing levels so districts need to collect data to determine what it will take to keep drivers and attendants working and performing well. 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 district yet not overburden district finances. As there will also 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 in both the public and private sectors and knowing the best methods for putting the district's recruiting message to potential drivers and attendants.

The Alachua County School District places significant effort on recruiting and retaining bus drivers and attendants. In spite of these efforts, the turnover rate is a concern as 28 drivers or attendants left the department during the six month period between June 2001 and December 2001 which includes resignations, retirements, and terminations. The district uses exit interviews and "personnel separation forms" to determine turnover data and reasons for leaving, assesses the information every six months, and attempts to resolve the primary causes of driver and attendant turnover.

The district has a unique program to notify the public of job opportunities in the Transportation Department, but does not compare wages and benefits to adjacent school districts or local employers to remain competitive. The Transportation Department uses a variety of low cost approaches and activities, such as local newspapers, newsletters, flyers, and the school board website, to recruit staff. The district also established a driver-recruitment team to visit local supermarkets, shopping centers, and local housing developments and finds this is an effective way to reach its target audience. The district's follow-up of individuals who have expressed interest in their employment options is excellent and aids the district in meeting its continual need for bus drivers.

> **We recommend that the district collect information on wages and benefits offered by adjacent school districts and by local employers that are likely to compete among the pool of applicants for positions in the district. This information should be used in comparing the district's relative competitiveness when recruiting replacement drivers and attendants and during contract negotiations.**

The district provides bus drivers and attendants with financial and other incentives for good performance based on safety records, attendance, and ability to maintain discipline on the bus. "Perfect attendance" awards are presented at the Transportation Department's annual back-to-school meeting. Driver's and attendants receive $100 for the first year of perfect attendance and $50 more each of the following years up to nine years or $500. Drivers and substitute drivers with an accident-free school year receive safe driver pins. A "Driver and Attendant for the Year" is chosen annually and recognized at the meeting, in local newspapers, and by the school board. During the 2000-01 school year, 138 and 30 drivers out of a possible 187 received safe driver and perfect attendance awards respectively.

The review team noted one area regarding bus drivers that the district should address. Unlike other school districts, drivers are paid for the full time during a breakdown as well as while bringing in a bus for a service. According to the driver's contracts and Union Collective Bargaining Agreements, the first hour of maintenance time is included in their guaranteed pay, while subsequent time is compensated according to their hourly rates. The review team also found that these drivers remain idle for most of this period instead of being used more productively. It is estimated that this unproductive time costs the district $25,756 annually.[5] If the district directed its drivers to other productive activities during these hours, it would be possible for the district to use these funds more effectively. One such activity could be to tow buses that need to be repaired at the International service center in Ocala, thereby reducing the workload of maintenance staff and allowing them to be more productive.

> **We recommend that the district negotiate assigning productive tasks, related to their positions, to bus drivers during the time spent at the service and repair facilities during bus breakdowns or when buses are brought in for service.**

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[5] Drivers were paid $6,582.21 for bus breakdown, bus repair, and monthly service hours in excess of their one-hour guarantee for the period between August 19, 2002 and October 21, 2002. If this pay is inferred over the total school year (assuming the school year to be 180 days), the total amount equates to $25,756.47

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.

Overall, the Alachua County School District has a satisfactory training program for bus drivers and bus driver attendants. The most serious challenges lie in minimizing the number of potential bus drivers that attend training but do not take positions with the district. As a result, the transportation staff critically evaluates potential drivers and makes every effort to train only those recruits who are likely to complete initial training and accept employment. Additionally, the district spreads out the bus driver's training stipend over a three-month period. In spite of the district's efforts, exit interviews indicated that at least six drivers received training during the 2001-02 school year but took employment elsewhere. The district should consider the feasibility of implementing a contract provision that if a individual completes the driver training program and does not complete six months employment as a bus driver, then the district would be reimbursed by the individual for all training related expenses. Though receptive to this suggestion, transportation staff voiced concern that it may be counterproductive since they experience considerable difficulty seeking applicants for the training program, but agree to examine the possibility. DOE is also researching the feasibility of a school bus driver's license that would only allow drivers trained by a school district to operate a school bus. DOE is trying to determine whether this would minimize the number of drivers that obtain their bus driver license from the district but then obtain employment elsewhere, while not reducing the attractiveness of employment.

The Safety and Training Department provides comprehensive training that encompasses the needs of both new and continuing employees. Formal training classes are supplemented with behind-the-wheel assistance to drivers needing skill improvement. Training, in groups of 50, facilitates communication between the trainer and bus drivers, and the use of a qualified in-house instructor reduces the district's training costs. Alachua's training program covers the DOE curriculum and additional topics such as emergency and safe driver procedures, maintaining appropriate student behavior, defensive driving classes, child check-mate procedures and information on current issues. [6] The district held eight in-service training sessions in addition to the required annual training during the 2001-02 school year for bus drivers, substitute bus drivers, and bus attendants which indicates the department's commitment to ensure that employees stay current with their licenses. Training session interactions, feedback, and questionnaires are used to evaluate training sessions, develop topics for future training sessions, and to identify concerns and grievances.

The school board has adopted a Safe Driver Plan to establish driver standards. The plan includes:

▪ the organizational structure and duties of the Safe Driver Review Committee;

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[6] Child check-mate procedures require drivers to be aware of students in-or-around the bus prior to, during, and after all bus runs for improved safety.

- accident review procedures to be taken by the Safe Driver Review Committee;
- definition of points assigned for violations; and
- stipulation of the range of points accumulated and disciplinary action to be recommended to the director of transportation.

The Safety and Training Department tracks assessed infraction points under the Safe Driver Plan. Drivers who accumulate 10 or more points must attend driver improvement programs with the National Safety Council or be terminated. Certain infringements result in immediate termination of employment. The district also regularly reviews all drivers' records to ensure that qualifications remain up to date, and that all required documentation is in the personnel files. Transportation personnel know they are required to report any tickets, citations, or convictions for any type of motor vehicle violation within two working days, regardless of the vehicle operated at the time of the incident, and the driver trainer completes weekly reviews the state traffic violations database. All incidents are reported to the Safe Driver Review Committee.

The district's one full time and one part time driver trainers assist only at the initial annual training. Evaluations of driver performance, such as uploading and downloading of students, random pre-trip inspections, and child-checkmate procedures occur following filed complaints. However, the district does not provide ongoing direct, regular oversight in bus handling techniques, driving skills, and pupil management techniques. The district's annual employee performance evaluation addresses general personnel matters, such as attendance, but does not consider the specific techniques and practices critical to bus driver performance. Regular assessment of bus driver performance should be added to the standard annual district personnel evaluation. The driver trainer can also improve supervision by performing random radar observations to ensure that drivers are in compliance with the district's safety regulations. Additionally, senior transportation officials (route coordinators and managers) can assist the driver trainer by performing random route surveys before, during, and after work.

> **We recommend that the district expand the personnel evaluation of bus driver performance evaluation to include random radar observations and random route surveys that specifically address basic handling and driving skills, pupil management techniques including behavior management and uploading and downloading of students, compliance with pre-trip inspections, and child-checkmate procedures.**

VEHICLE ACQUISITION AND MAINTENANCE

Best Practice 8: Using

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.

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 Alachua County School District minimizes costs by acquiring all new school buses through the state purchasing pool. All new buses are thoroughly inspected for defects in accordance with the Florida Specifications Manual before being put into service. The director of transportation, regional supervisors, supervisor for vehicle services, and the routing and scheduling supervisor collectively assign new buses to routes and geographical areas with the greatest need based on the age of existing fleet and growth of the area. Older buses are rotated to shorter or smaller routes, used as spare buses, or removed from service.

The district has appropriate standards for making decisions on repairing versus replacing aging buses and has a plan that meets replacement needs and anticipates district growth. DOE recommends, but does not require, that school buses be replaced on a 10-year cycle. Many districts have extended their replacement cycle because new buses have longer operating lives due to improvements in design and durability of major components (engines and transmissions). [7] Alachua County School District has established a 12-year or 200,000-mile bus replacement guideline, with replacement based on these criteria if funds are available. The district maintains bus purchase records that support the 12-year or 200,000-mile replacement guideline. With little to no projected growth in enrollment, the district plan is sufficient to accommodate the transportation needs of future student populations. Buses that are older than 12 years, but still in acceptable condition in accordance with DOE safety guidelines, are used as regular route spares, ESE route spares, or are assigned to high school coaches for transportation on activity trips.

In order take maximum advantage of the district's school buses estimated useful lives, based on a 12-year replacement guideline, the district should gradually purchase buses, replacing only 8.33% of total buses during any given year. [8] This equates to an annual purchase of 16 buses per year if the district were to a follow their replacement guidelines each year. Exhibit 9-10 shows that the district's bus fleet is relatively young, with 68% of the fleet purchased in the past six years. This exhibit also shows that 7 to 10 years ago, the district did not follow replacement guidelines because of budget cuts and constraints and under-purchased needed vehicles. As a result, the district increased its purchases of buses over the past six years.

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[7] Expected engine life cycles (DT-Ford 466 engines) of large diesel transit type C and D buses, purchased during the last five years, are estimated at 400,000 to 450,000 miles. Prior to that expected engine life cycles of these buses were estimated at 250,000-300,000 miles.

[8] This percentage is obtained by dividing 100% of buses by 12 years (100/12) to equal 8.33%

ValienteHernandez P.A.

Exhibit 9-10
Alachua County School District's Bus Fleet is Relatively Young

Age in Years	Number of Buses	Percentage	Usage and Average Mileage
13-14	28	14%	4 Regular spare buses (299,205 miles); 5 ESE spare buses (259,003 miles); 19 activity trips buses (267,677 miles)
12	10	5%	4 Regular buses in daily service (231,360 miles); 6 regular spare buses (223, 270 miles)
11	0	0%	Buses removed from service due to manufacturers defect (18 spare buses)
10	2	1%	ESE spare buses
9	3	2%	2 ESE buses in daily service; 1 ESE spare bus
8	13	6%	7 Regular buses in daily service; 6 ESE buses in daily service
7	7	4%	5 Regular buses in daily service; 2 ESE buses in daily service
6	25	12%	23 Regular buses in daily service; 2 ESE buses in daily service
5	14	7%	8 Regular buses in daily service; 3 ESE buses in daily service; 3 ESE spares buses
4	17	8%	17 Regular buses in daily service
3	18	9%	15 Regular buses in daily service; 3 ESE buses in daily service
2	18	9%	15 Regular buses in daily service; 3 ESE buses in daily service
1	23	11%	18 Regular buses in daily service; 3 ESE buses in daily service
Less than 1	25	12%	15 Regular buses in daily service; 7 ESE buses in daily service
Total	**203**	**100%**	

Source: Alachua County School District Transportation Department, March 2003.

Because the district did not purchase buses in accordance with its replacement guideline and the relatively young age of the bus fleet, the district can acquire fewer buses over the next five years to bring the age of its bus fleet in line with its replacement guideline. Considering a 10% regular spare bus ratio and a 15% ESE spare bus ratio (see below), the district would have to replace 61 buses over the next five years, at a rate of 12 buses a year. For the ensuing years, the district can then follow its normal rate of replacement of 16 buses, based on its 12-year replacement guideline and bus needs.

> **We recommend that the district bring the age of its bus fleet in line with its own 12-year-replacement guideline and commit to acquiring its bus fleet on a gradual basis over this cycle.**

The ultimate decision whether to remove an older bus from service depends on the condition of the specific bus (age, mileage, and current value), availability and value of parts, estimated cost of repair, and frequency and details of previous repairs. Although the district thoroughly analyzes the replacement decision on older buses by reviewing previous maintenance cost and frequency of repairs, it is hindered because the fleet maintenance software does not generate adequate data. The district has to manually pull and review all previous work orders on the particular bus. This practice will be more efficient with the implementation of the recommendation to purchase and implement a automated vehicle maintenance management system to track itemized vehicle expenditure (Best Practice 17).

When the district decides to remove a bus from service, it makes every effort to recover as much of the cost as possible. Some buses are disassembled ("cannibalized") for usable parts while others are removed from service and sold at private auctions.

Spare buses augment daily bus needs for regularly scheduled maintenance or breakdowns and other peak use needs. A generally accepted goal for a school district transportation department is a 10% spare bus ratio. As indicated in Exhibit 9-10, the district has 10 regular spare buses (four are older than 12 years) to

cover 130 regular routes and 11 ESE spare buses (five are older than 12 years) to cover 34 ESE routes. This equates to a spare bus ratio of 8% (5% under 12 years old) and 32% (18% under 12 years old) for regular and ESE buses respectively. In addition, the district has allocated nineteen 13-14 year old buses to high school coaches and teachers to cover football activity trips.

During March 2003, the district pulled 18 regular and ESE 1991 buses from its spare bus fleet, due to a newly discovered manufacturer's defect. DOE and the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration are investigating other buses of the same make and model across the state. [9]

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 that its vehicles be properly maintained to operate well and maximize their value. District vehicle maintenance operations can be divided into two types: those that service only 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 senior transportation officials track vehicle maintenance for all on-road vehicles owned by the district to ensure that timely servicing is performed. Use of this tracking can help the district make appropriate decisions whether to make complex or expensive repairs on older vehicles. The servicing of non-bus vehicles does not have to be accomplished in district-owned facilities, especially if there is a lack of facilities and manpower, but it can also be outsourced. Experts within the district vehicle maintenance operation can use their knowledge to obtain economical and timely service by vendors. Quality control by district staff needs to ensure that servicing and repairs, both by district staff and by vendors, is properly accomplished.

The Alachua County School District's buses are inspected every 20 working days in accordance with the Florida School Bus Safety Manual and in compliance with Rule 6A-3.017, *Florida Administrative Code* (FAC). [10] Full-time certified inspectors, working from a standardized DOE checklist, perform these inspections. The inspector also reviews the bus' service record and mileage for preventive maintenance service needs to ensure these repairs are properly completed. The district ensures that all inspections are on time by distributing schedules to service shop personnel and installing schedules on the school bus. Drivers are also reminded of an upcoming inspection by service shop staff and the regional dispatch unit.

Any problems or preventive maintenance needs identified by an inspector are referred to the maintenance staff for repair. Department staff maintains and reviews the inspection records for completeness and accuracy. The district did not receive any adverse comments on the most recent DOE review and our review of randomly selected work orders showed that all buses were inspected within the required schedule.

Quality of the work is ensured through the use of quality control staff to spot-check a selection of work orders and the shop foremen and lead mechanics randomly reviews the service and repair work from other regional service shops. All quality reviews are documented and maintained at the regional service shops.

Drivers must perform a pre-trip inspection prior to leaving the parking compound and report any deficiencies to the service shop for repair. The district has outlined clear and concise procedures for pre-trip inspections to bus operators in its driver's handbook. Daily pre-trip inspection logs must be turned into the regional office before the start of the following week.

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[9] These deletions are reflected in the current spare bus figures and ratio's

[10] As noted previously, FDOE guidelines changed in March 2003 to allow a 30-day inspection cycle.

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 Alachua County School District purchases fuel through a competitive bid process in cooperation with other counties and agencies to ensure that the district receives savings through bulk discounts. Agreements are valid for one year with the option to renew for annual periods up to four years on the same terms and conditions.

The district monitors fuel usage and tank levels daily, which facilitates the management and timing of fuel purchases. Reordering levels are based on average daily consumption, and fuel is ordered 48 hours ahead of the minimum tank levels. Fuel stations have not run out of fuel, nor have deliveries been curtailed because tanks were too full.

The district has four fueling sites with underground tanks serving the four largest and most active geographical areas. Each site is equipped with a fuel monitoring and alarm system to detect possible leaks. The sites are convenient and accessible, are well situated, and have adequate one-way in and outbound traffic. Access to satellite fueling sites is limited to mornings, with an attendant to monitor the fueling.

Maintenance staff routinely inspects the condition of fuel dispensers and equipment, and staff monitors wells for possible leaks or other environmental concerns. These inspections are documented and indicate the corrective actions implemented. Transportation staff also cooperates with the state environmental officials who inspect each maintenance facility, including the fueling stations, twice per year. The district responds appropriately to issues raised during these inspections.

However, while the district is using this best practice, it could strengthen the use of its controls over the security and accuracy of its fuel pumping activities. Each driver has a plastic key for the fuel pump that validates the bus number, type of fuel, limit allowed, and drivers name before fuel is dispensed. This information is transmitted through hard phone lines to the automated fuel system. The driver enters the mileage or odometer reading. Although these controls could effectively maintain the security and accuracy of the district's fuel records, they are frequently overridden, and there is a lack of control over fueling keys. Each driver has a fueling key for a specific bus, but these keys are generally kept off-site since only 46% of the district's buses are compounded. When the fueling key is not available, a master key is used, which allows fuel dispensing without a bus number or odometer reading. When data is not entered, the automated fueling system cannot calculate fuel consumption. Failure to correctly use the automated fueling system means that the district can not summarize the fuel consumption for a particular bus or vehicle over time. In addition, while there is no indication that fuel is being lost or misdirected as a result of lax controls, the district cannot regularly reconcile fuel disbursements and actual purchases, leaving the district open to unauthorized fuel disbursements and possible unnoticed fuel leaks. If the district enforced better control over fueling keys and data inputs during the fueling process, the district could track fuel consumption per vehicle and reconcile daily usage to purchases and actual tank

measurements. Fuel consumption data would assist the district in strategic managerial decisions such as vehicle performance and removal and replacement decisions. Through daily reconciliation of fuel movements, the district would be able to effectively monitor unauthorized fuel disbursements.

Finally, although the automated fueling system generates fuel invoices for billing to other departments, the system is also not set-up to summarize fuel usage and billings by department. In addition, the district must re-enter these invoices on mainframe system because the two systems are not integrated.

> **We recommend that the district develop and implement improved controls over fueling keys and data input during the fueling process, monitor fuel consumption per vehicle, and perform reconciliation of daily fuel movement. In addition, the district programmers should expand the automated fueling system to view summarized billings to other departments.**

Best Practice 11: Using

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

If uncontrolled, vehicle maintenance costs can represent a significant expense to school districts and, thus, should be effectively managed. To efficiently maintain vehicles, a district must have maintenance facilities that are appropriately situated to minimize distances vehicles must travel for servicing while still having access to vehicle parts houses and delivery services. These facilities need to be constructed to give buses and other vehicles easy access to the service areas. 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 generate hazardous wastes such as anti-freeze that need to be stored and disposed of properly. 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 this can be shown to be in the district's best financial interests. 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 frequently respond to calls after normal working hours and must transport materials not easily carried in personal passenger vehicles (such as heavy welding equipment or sheets of plywood).

The Alachua County School District has one maintenance facility that is centrally located to minimize distances that district vehicles must travel for servicing. The facility has an adequate layout, specialized tools, proper safety features, and an available manual for service technicians and mechanics. [11] The facility includes a repair and maintenance shop with 13 covered work bays, a vehicle inspection shop, and a body repair shop, each with two covered work bays. In addition, the service area has an adjoining parts and storage shop and maintenance control and data entry offices. The district has efficient controls in place to limit access to these areas and the district's safety officer annually inspects the facility to ensure employee safety is maintained.

Although the district received adverse comments during the previous EPA inspection, the transportation staff effectively cleared comments and established procedures to control and minimize the generation of any hazardous wastes from district vehicle service centers and to safely and securely store any generated hazardous wastes. A vendor retrieves and disposes waste oil, filters, and contaminated fluids and the Transportation Department has procedures to promote environmental compliance and to clean-up spills. The district also uses a buy-back program to dispose of old tires and purchase new ones. The district indicated it received $15,148 in credits from May 2001 and February 2002, making it very cost efficient.

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[11] Specialized tools and supports include vehicle lifts, tire work areas, paint and bodywork areas, parts storage areas, and computers.

The district's transportation staff continues to evaluate and assess facilities requirements, evidenced by district reports to identify additional compounding and servicing areas within the county. Although the best practice does not prohibit school districts from allowing drivers to compound buses at home, consolidating compounding of school buses on district property could significantly improve efficiencies in the district. The district has five secured compound sites. Exhibit 9-11 identifies the buses that are currently compounded or home-stored, and the space available at each compound site.

The compounds at Newberry, Santa Fe/Alachua, and Hawthorne are under utilized and can accommodate all buses serving their immediate areas, while the central and Archer compound areas do not have enough space available. To address this need, as of January 2003, the district purchased two acres adjacent to Archer Community School for school staff parking and a designated bus compounding area and has attempted to purchase an adjoining five acres in the same area. The Archer or southwest Gainesville areas is where the district is experiencing the highest student population shift, and the needs in this vicinity are expected to continue increasing. If the bus compound area in the Archer were completed, the district could compound the 22 home stored buses serving this area. In addition, the 19 buses that are home stored at central compound area (central Gainesville) serving the southwest Gainesville area could also be stored at this new property.

Exhibit 9-11
The District's Compounded Buses Compared to
Home Stored Buses Per Available Bus Compound Area

Type	Central Compound	Newberry	Santa Fe/ Alachua	Hawthorne	Archer	Totals
Compounded	114	2	14	3	2	101
Home Stored	19	21	17	9	22	120
Total	**133**	**23**	**31**	**12**	**24**	**221**
Space Available	114	30	50	15	5	180
Percentage compounded	100%	7%	28%	25%	7.8%	46%
Percentage if all buses were compounded	117%	77%	62%	80%	480%	123%

Source: Alachua County School District Transportation Department, 2003.

In accordance with the Collective Bargaining Agreement between the school board and the Alachua County Education Association, bus drivers must compound their buses within 30 days or less if they are requested to do so. The district would realize a number of benefits if the fleet were compounded.

▪ Buses could be repaired during normal work hours, which would save on overtime costs for maintenance staff. Previously mechanics were on call 24 hours/7 days a week as buses sometimes need to be repaired at drivers' homes.

▪ There would be more productive time from maintenance staff since technicians could be sent to the compound instead to bus driver homes for repairs in case of breakdowns.

▪ Fewer spares would be needed because the bus would be available in case the regular driver is unexpectedly absent.

▪ There would be improved supervision over pre-trip inspections.

▪ The miles on buses would be reduced miles because they would be readily available for servicing.

▪ There would be a reduced risk of accidents since buses would spend less time on the road.

> **We recommend that the district compound all or most of its bus fleet at the nearest compounds on a space available basis and that the designed bus compound at the newly purchased property at Archer Community School be accomplished.**

Best Practice 12: Using

The district maintains an inventory of parts, supplies, and equipment needed to support transportation functions that balances the concerns of immediate need and inventory costs.

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 use the warranties provided by bus manufacturers, thus avoiding paying for repairs and parts that are covered by warranty.

The Alachua County School District maintains a good balance between the size and cost inventory of parts, supplies and equipment, and the need for the inventory. The district accomplished this by standardizing its fleet and by running weekly and bi-weekly re-order reports based on average parts turnover and expected date of delivery.

The district's mainframe system runs two computerized orders which are reviewed by parts personnel and compared to physical stock levels before being submitted. One weekly order is run for parts with low turnover and low priority. The other orders are done twice weekly, with priority items flagged by the system. Re-order and safety levels are determined by the two stock parts specialists based on historic and projected usage. Items are classified as obsolete when buses are sold and the district sells these items at the highest price.

The district uses competitive bids, local pool purchases, pre-negotiated state contracts, and discounted blanket purchase orders to obtain parts cost effectively. Competitive bids for annual repetitive purchases greater than $25,000 include the most high usage parts and supplies such as batteries, brake shoes, brake linings, brake drums, seat covers, Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) parts, seat foam, petroleum products, injectors and pumps, strobes and bulbs, alternators and starters, seals, recycled antifreeze, and waste disposal. Tires and filters are purchased using the state contract terms, conditions, and unit prices through local vendors. In addition, the district also has a buy-back program where old tires are bought back for $3 per tire and credits applied. Discounted blanket purchase orders are used for other OEM parts which are purchased at the "national fleet" price. Support vehicles parts are purchased from local vendors using purchase orders, obtaining a minimum of three quotes per order.

Vehicle maintenance staff evaluates purchased items for compliance with bid price, specifications, and vendor performance. The parts and supplies specialist reviews all received orders to ensure that the correct parts were delivered and that the bid price agrees to the price on the invoice. The parts room has controlled access to help keep inventory secure, and all parts locations and inventory records are monitored.

The district's mainframe supports a perpetual inventory system that tracks the description, location, quantity on hand, cost, order point, safety stock, minimum and maximum supply, last activity, and last count. Replaced parts are brought to the parts room and staff input the part number into a data base to track which bus the part had come from. The staff checks whether the bus or part is still under warranty, using information that is electronically available by tracking warranties is not computerized. Thus, despite staff's best efforts there is no assurance that items under warranty are not repaired or replaced at the district's expense.

As indicated in Best Practice 17 of this chapter, it is recommended that the district purchase an automated vehicle maintenance management program with the capabilities to track warranty information and life cycles of all parts purchased, to ensure that all possible warranty claims are processed.

Before February 2003 the district was not registered as a warranty center, requiring all warranty work to be sent to manufacturer's repair shops. The nearest repair center is more than forty miles and from October 2002 to January 2003 the district sent 43 buses for warranty work, for an average of 11 buses per month. [12] This resulted in excessive downtime for buses which created difficulties in spare bus availability, as more buses are needed to cover unexpected situations. In addition, it requires two staff members to travel an hour each way. The district has used maintenance staff for this purpose and the review team believes this staff time could be used more productively. If the district registered as a warranty center and could perform all non-major repairs, it could save approximately $7,700 in "unproductive" maintenance work time. [13] By performing non-major warranty repairs in-house the district can reduce bus repairs time and ultimately improve the efficiency of school bus operations. During February 2003 the district registered as a warranty center.

OPERATIONS, MANAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Best Practice 13: Using

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.

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 Alachua County School District has established effective, standardized procedures to respond to bus breakdowns, accidents, and other unexpected events. These procedures are outlined in the district's driver's manual, and they are reinforced during driver training sessions and via memos. During breakdowns, the school bus driver uses the on-board radio to call the regional transportation center dispatch operator, who in turn notifies the service shop. A replacement bus and mechanic are sent to transport students and make repairs.

The district has set clear and concise guidelines for drivers to report absences by either:

▪ submitting a leave request, which is considered for long-term scheduling; or

▪ calling the dispatcher's office at least one hour before route departure time.

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[12] Ocala.

[13] Eleven buses per month x 9 months x 2 mechanics x 3 hours (one hour each way, and hour of uploading and downloading) x $13 per hour wage = $7,772.

These guidelines are included on job descriptions and in drivers' handbooks, which drivers sign for as proof of receipt when beginning employment. Dispatchers manually keep a daily attendance log of all drivers. Substitute drivers wait at central administrative offices or outlying areas and are notified by two-way radio system if they are needed. The district has 24 substitutes to cover 163 routes, which equates to a 15% expected absenteeism ratio. The district's average daily absenteeism rate for the 2001-02 school year was 16 bus drivers, which equates to a 10% absenteeism ratio, but from August 19, 2002 to November 27, 2002, the district experienced an average daily absenteeism rate of 24.27 for bus drivers or a 15% ratio. [14, 15] This absentee increase is what forced the district to increase its substitute drivers to 15%, but the district has not yet assessed the reason for the increase in absenteeism. As previously noted, the district has a bus driver attendance incentive program to reduce the unexpected absenteeism, rewarding perfect attendance. The incentive is only given annually however, and the district has researched the merits of restructuring the attendance incentive program by adjusting bonuses to reward perfect attendance in a 45-day cycle, believing this would further reduce unexpected absences.

> **We recommend that the district review the absenteeism rates of bus drivers and attendants over time in order to analyze any negative trends and implement strategies to minimize driver absenteeism.**

The district tries to minimize overcrowding through efficient routing and has adequate procedures if this circumstance occurs. Drivers perform a head count after each stop and an over-crowded bus is immediately reported to the dispatch office. Additional buses are sent out to cover remaining stops. Once overcrowding has occurred, the transportation route coordinator requests a weekly count and researches alternatives for redesigning affected routes, generally by re-routing buses with available space.

Additionally, the district tries to limit the one-way ride times on school buses to less than prescribed state standards of 50 minutes for elementary students and 60 minutes for secondary school students. Route coordinators check student ride times for each route once a semester and summarize this information for each bus and school, including start and stop times as well as travel time. For all routes over the state standards, the route coordinator tracks the following information

- bus, school, start and end times of the morning and afternoon runs;
- the number of students affected;
- whether the students are part of one of the following programs: Magnet, ESOL-transportation, Rural transportation (Alachua, High Springs, Newberry, Archer, Micanopy, Waldo, Horizon/New Pathways and Loften rural areas); and
- possibility to shorten rides.

Efforts to minimize ride times is balanced against the cost of adding more buses, and as previously described, the district has creatively developed routes that are both cost-efficient and minimize ride times. Exhibit 9-12 shows the standard ride time for various transportation programs, and indicates that the children attending magnet schools or who live in rural areas are more likely to be assigned to routes that are longer than state guideline ride times. Prior to enrollment in a magnate program, parents are informed that program participants may face longer ride times.

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[14] 2,928 absences were noted for the period August 8, 2001 to May 31, 2002 – 183 school days.

[15] 1699 absences were noted for the period August 19, 2002 to November 27, 2002 – 70 school days.

Exhibit 9-12
Students in Rural Areas and Magnate Programs
May Have Ride Times Longer Than the State Recommended Guidelines

Category	State Guidelines	Rural Students With Long Ride Times	City Students With Long Ride Times	Total Students With Long Ride Times
ESE Students	75 minutes	19	3	22
Regular Elementary Students	50 minutes	260	55	315
Regular Middle School Students	60 minutes	70	20	90
Regular High School Students	50 minutes	140	4	144
Magnet Elementary School Students	60 minutes	N/A	N/A	43
Magnet Middle School Students	60 minutes	N/A	N/A	76
Magnet High School Students	60 minutes	N/A	N/A	161
Alternative Education Centers	60 minutes	N/A	N/A	51
Totals [1]	**60 minutes**	**489**	**82**	**902**

[1] The total for rural and city based students does not add up to the total number of students with long ride times because detailed data for each category is not available.

Source: Alachua County School District Transportation Department, 2003.

The school board has a policy regarding discharging students at stops other than their assigned stop. The parent or legal guardian must submit a written request to the school. Then the school approves the change by forwarding the note signed by the parent or guardian and the school principal to the bus operator. The district enforces the policy by documenting requests for changes in bus stops and communicating driver responsibilities via written instructions, operator manuals and during training sessions.

The district has administrative guidelines governing activity trips and has established standardized procedures for ordering field trips, assigning drivers, and billing these services to the appropriate school accounts. These administrative guidelines outline the classification of activity trips and the funding procedures based on their classification. Details of field trips are submitted on a computerized field trip system and schools can request field trips through a secure Internet site. Drivers are assigned to field trips based on seniority and in accordance with the provisions of the union contract, which provides for the rotation of these assignments.

Current charges for field trips are based on a mileage rate and the hourly rate for the use of a bus driver. As outlined in Exhibit 9-13, the district charges external users, such as University of Florida and YMCA, $15 per hour and $0.95 per mile. Rates charged to schools are $11 per hour and $0.55 per mile. The district does not charge for the services provided using the 13 and 14-year-old spare buses that have been specifically assigned to high school coaches. Additionally, all operator charges for meals and accommodation are charged for all trips requiring overnight stays.

Exhibit 9-13 also shows that the five peer districts have very different approaches to charging schools and outside users for activity trips. Each peer district, except Collier, recoup field trips costs with a charge-out structure that is based on the hours spent by the driver on the field trip and on the actual field trip mileage. These charge-out structures incorporate the major costs associated with field trips. All peer districts except St. Lucie have a higher mileage rate for internal and external users.

Exhibit 9-13
Rates Charged For Activity Trips Vary Among School Districts

	Alachua	**Bay**	**Collier**	**Lake**	**Marion**	**St. Lucie**
Rate Charged for External Users	$0.95 per mile plus $15 per hour	$1 per mile, plus $14.50 per hour	$1.14 per mile, plus $14.09 per hour	$1.80 per mile, plus $14.00 per hour	N/A	$1 per mile plus $20.00 per hour
Rates Charged for Schools	$.55 per mile, plus $11.00 per hour; In addition high school activity trips are free of charge	$1 per mile, plus $14.50 per hour	$19.75 per hour	$.1.60 per mile, plus $14.00 per hour	$1.25 per mile, plus $13.55 per hour	$0.50 per mile, plus $20.00 per hour

Source: Alachua County School District Transportation Department; Peer district questionnaires, 2003.

Exhibit 9-14 shows the totals mileage, hours, actual revenue generated, and actual costs of field trips charged to schools as presented by the district's Transportation Department. The billing structure and rates charged do not recover the full cost of school's activity trips, with only 87% ($82,985 of $95,425) of the cost recovered. The rate charged to external users is adequate to recoup the full costs of providing the service.

Exhibit 9-14
District Field Trip Charges to Schools Do Not Cover Actual Costs, 2001-02

	Field Trips	**Total Miles**	**Total Hours**	**Revenue**	**Actual Transportation Costs [1]**
In County	2,754	34,416	2,958	$51,470	$60,709
Out of County	676	22,705	1,730	$31,515	$34,716
Totals	3,430	57,121	4,688	$82,985	$95,425

[1] Based on estimated mileage cost of $0.93 per mile. This was calculated as the per non-bus driver salary and benefits portion of the 2001-2002 operating expenditure per mile of the transportation department. (1-($3,800,858/ $8,949,705)) x $1.62). In addition, actual drivers wages paid for activity trips of $28,702 and 13, 600 for in- and out-of county activity trips are also included in the estimate.

Source: Alachua County School District Transportation Department, 2003.

Although the district is using this best practice, it should try to recover the full activity trip cost from the requesting entity including bus operating cost per mile, driver salary and administrative cost, as this would increase annual allocation of Transportation Department revenues by approximately $12,440. [16]

> **We recommend that the district charge the full cost for activity trips to schools.**

Best Practice 14: Using

The district provides efficient transportation services for exceptional students in a coordinated fashion that minimizes hardships to students.

School districts are required by law to provide specialized transportation services to certain students with disabilities (i.e., students in Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs). [17] While necessary, these

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[16] $95,425-$82,985 = $12,440 if the district will continue to provide activity trips at current levels.

services can be very costly to a district. Many ESE students can ride on regular buses with no assistance or equipment. However, others may require accommodations such as specially equipped buses that lift a student and wheelchair into the bus and secure it for transport. To ensure their compliance with law while controlling costs, school districts need effective systems for determining ESE students' need for special transportation. As the need for special transportation is determined in meetings between teachers, ESE staff, and parents, districts need policies that clearly outline the circumstances that require special transportation. These policies also should identify circumstances in which alternative transportation modes, such as paying parents to drive children who need special supervision. Finally, districts should seek to recover Medicaid reimbursement for ESE transportation whenever possible, as this federal program will reimburse school districts for transporting Medicaid-eligible students on certain approved bus runs. It is rare for the cost to complete Medicaid paperwork to exceed the amount of the reimbursement. Every Medicaid dollar coming into the district frees up a general fund dollar for another district need.

The Alachua County School District has established procedures to guide decisions regarding transportation services for students with special educational needs. The 1975 federal law entitled "*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*" (IDEA) largely controls the decision-making process for exceptional students requiring an individual education plan (IEP) be developed for every exceptional student, with the plan controlling which services, including transportation, that student receives. The intent of the IEP is to determine how best to serve exceptional students in the least restrictive environment. The IEP is generally developed by classroom teachers, parents, exceptional student education (ESE) teachers, psychologists, and guidance counselors.

The key to strong support services for ESE students is good communication with the ESE instructional staff and parents. To that end, the district created a liaison position to assist schools and parents with ESE transportation issues. Although the ESE transportation and route coordinator does not have a role in creating IEPs, the coordinator participates in IEP meetings to assist in making the most appropriate and cost-effective decisions for meeting the transportation requirements of ESE students. The ESE route coordinator verifies any transportation needs in the IEP, indicating whether:

- individual special transportation is needed (medical equipment, tinted windows etc.);

- special needs of the student can be met on regular buses by requiring an aide or a monitor; or

- if no special transportation needs are noted, the ESE route coordinator assigns the student to a regular bus.

The district has 1,761 registered ESE students, of which 513 students are transported in specialized ESE buses. No data is available on the number of ESE students that are transported on regular buses since the district does not track this information. The district owns 46 buses with various capacities and amenities to accommodate the special transportation needs of ESE students. [18] Additional amenities such as safety harnesses, toddler seats, infant seats, fabricated padded barriers, and leg rests are installed, when needed, by the service shops. These school buses are sufficient to service the 34 ESE bus routes each day.

While the district is using this best practice, it could improve its operations in two ways. First, the district should adopt a board policy to define the criteria for when specialized transportation services are appropriate, specify guidelines and procedures to verify the need for specialized transportation services, and include procedures for assigning the student on a bus. This policy should also include a statement that ESE students should be mainstreamed on regular buses when possible. By establishing and enforcing formalized policy and procedures the district can improve the efficiency in assigning of ESE students and ensure that ESE students that do not need more expensive specialized transportation services do not receive them.

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[17] The ESE population in a school includes gifted students, slow learners, emotionally handicapped students, and physically handicapped students.

[18] These include medical equipment, wheelchairs and lifts.

> **We recommend that the district establish a school board policy on transporting ESE students on specialized buses only when needed and appropriate.**

Second, the district does not identify ESE students who qualify for Medicaid eligible transportation reimbursement funding and therefore does not make claims for Medicaid reimbursement. Despite some efforts by the Transportation Department to research the possibility of claiming Medicaid reimbursement, the district is currently not doing so.

Medicaid would reimburse the district a set rate of $4.35 for each one-way trip for each eligible exceptional student receiving any medical treatment or service. The district will receive the federal portion (58.83%) of the rate, or $2.18 per trip. For example, a Medicaid-eligible exceptional student who receives physical therapy at a school site as part of his/her individual education plan would make the district eligible to receive partial reimbursement for bus trips that delivered her/him to the school site for therapy and subsequently returned the student home.

Estimates by DOE on Alachua County School District suggest that approximately 44.08% of exceptional students that require specialized individual transportation are also eligible for Medicaid, and those students receive at least eight eligible trips per month. Using these estimates, approximately 167 (408 x 44.08%) students at the district would qualify for Medicaid eligible trips. If these students use school transportation for this service over 180 school days (nine calendar months) at four trips per month times $2.18 times two for the round trip, the district could receive approximately $28,229 a year from this funding source. Considering the cost of employing a contractor at a cost of 55% of the revenue generated, the net revenue to the district is approximately $12,702 annually or $63,510 over a five-year period. The district should make every effort to collect Medicaid reimbursement for all qualifying student transportation trips. The district could receive an approximate annual amount of $12,702 from this new funding source.

> **We recommend the district develop a procedure to ensure that Medicaid reimbursement for qualifying students' transportation is collected.**

Best Practice 15: Using

The district ensures that 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 compliance with federal and state laws. [19]

The Alachua County School District has well-defined written procedures to be followed in the case of a bus accident. These procedures are communicated to bus drivers and other transportation staff in their annual renewal training so that each staff member is acquainted with his/her role and responsibilities in emergencies.

The district has an effective system to monitor communications whenever buses are in operation. All school buses have two-way radios to communicate with the dispatchers and report relevant information regarding an accident. All accidents, regardless of severity, must be reported. A driver's failure to report an accident can result in dismissal from service.

Upon receipt of an accident call, the dispatch unit notifies the appropriate resources to respond to the situation, which may include: emergency 911 and police, school principals, driver trainers skilled in

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[19] 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.

accident investigation, and garage personnel for the damaged bus. The dispatch unit is also responsible for notifying the director of transportation and risk management. The driver trainer and other four other senior transportation staff have clear and concise procedures to follow upon arrival on the accident scene, which include:

- photographing the entire accident scene, nearby intersections, and points of impact;
- demarcating the accident scene with measuring tape, markers, and spray paint for further evaluations; and
- documenting interviews and observations on accident and injury forms.

All accidents are investigated, documented, and reviewed by the Safe Driver Review Committee under the Safe Driver Plan. The district also complies with state accident reporting requirements, which require districts to report all school bus accidents involving $500 or more damage to the DOE. The district's reported accidents per 100,000 miles show a declining trend over the past five years as illustrated in Exhibit 12-15. Exhibit 12-16 indicates that the district reported the third lowest number of accidents per 100,000 miles driven in its peer group.

Exhibit 12-15
The District's Accident Rate Has Declined Over the Past Five Years

Year	Above $500	Preventable (Charged)	Non-Preventable (Not Charged)	Annual Mileage	Accidents Over $500 Per 100,000 Miles
2000-01	21	5	16	4,913,208	0.43
1999-00	20	8	12	5,009,789	0.39
1998-99	28	9	19	5,104,211	0.55
1997-98	19	12	7	4,907,937	0.39
1996-97	32	9	23	5,034,185	0.64

Source: Alachua County School District Transportation Department, 2003.

Exhibit 12-16
Alachua County School District Has Fewer Accidents
Per 100,000 Miles Driven Than Its Peers, 2000-01

School District	Total Number of Accidents	Total Miles Driven	Reported Accidents Per 100,0000 Miles
Alachua	21	4,913,208	0.43
Bay	14	2,541,050	0.55
Collier	9	4,980,261	0.18
Lake	21	4,296,659	0.49
Marion	20	8,566,053	0.23
St. Lucie	43	6,626,589	0.65
Peer Average	21.40	5,402,122	0.40

Source: Q-Link: Florida School District Transportation Profiles, 2002, for 2000-01, DOE.

Best Practice 16: Using

The district ensures that appropriate student behavior is maintained on the bus with students being held accountable for financial consequences of misbehavior related to transportation.

Inappropriate student behavior on school buses can distract bus drivers from their responsibility to drive their buses safely and can potentially result in accidents, cause injury to students and others, and saddle the school district with costly legal liabilities. Therefore, school districts need effective methods to

control the behavior of students while they are being transported. Several individuals primarily responsible for ensuring the appropriate conduct of these students and should be involved in developing these methods. For example, school principals are responsible for the conduct of students on buses from the time students get on the buses until the time they leave them. School bus drivers assist in the maintaining appropriate student behavior on school buses through various management techniques and by writing disciplinary referrals to principals when appropriate. Principals can assist bus drivers in maintaining student bus discipline by informing them of what disciplinary actions are taking place in response to written disciplinary referrals.

The Alachua County School District has established policies, procedures, and standards of expected conduct for all students provided transportation services. These policies, procedures and standards are outlined in the district's "Student Code of Conduct" and stipulate expected behavior on the bus and outline parents' responsibilities. The director of transportation also sends a letter of "School Bus Student Regulations" to all parents or guardians outlining expected student behavior on buses. School bus policy emphasizes expected appropriate behavior and states that violations of the standards will not be tolerated.

Students that do not follow acceptable standards of conduct on the bus are subject to similar disciplinary actions as those administered for classroom school misconduct. Driver's who observe or suspect misconduct submit a written referral to the school principal or designee. The principal determines if standards were violated and any disciplinary action to be taken. Disciplinary action may include suspension of bus privileges or, in extreme cases, expulsion from the bus and parents must provide transportation. During the 2001-02 school year 1,138 students had bus privileges suspended.

The Transportation Department receives feedback on any disciplinary actions and this information is made available to bus drivers. In addition, school staff, exceptional education staff, and transportation staff work together to resolve chronic or acute student school bus discipline problems, including parental notification.

The district has made several efforts to respond to disciplinary issues. For example, all buses are equipped with video cameras that can record both student and driver behavior and provide good documentation to support any allegations. The transportation staff states that the cameras have reduced the number of problems. Well-trained bus drivers who understand the basic principles of pupil management can also support safe bus riding behavior. Assertiveness training and pupil management techniques are part of the initial bus driver training curriculum and are covered during in-service classes. The driver's handbook provides several pages of discussion and guidance on disciplinary issues for bus drivers' subsequent reference.

The district has a policy to bill parents for any damage to school buses caused by their child. The student can be refused transportation until the bill is settled. Schools have allowed the students to work off the payment at their school, and the school then reimburses the transportation department. The district has made substantial efforts to collect restitution for vandalism. The district notifies parents in writing and pursues the suspension of bus privileges until restitution is made. During the 2001-02 school year, the district had six vandalism cases involving damage of $1,878 of which $792 has been collected as of May 2003 as restitution.

Best Practice 17: Not Using

The district provides appropriate technological and computer support for transportation functions and operations, but must improve its planning efforts and use of technology for tracking maintenance activities.

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 Alachua County School District's budget and expenditure information is received from the district's financial and accounting software, which maintains all transportation costs that are reported under a separate cost center. The information is provided in real time and the Transportation Department can perform daily reviews if necessary. This information provides the basis to develop the district's annual budget and for a monthly review of actual expenditures vs. budgeted amounts. The transportation budget includes several cost categories: employee salary and benefits, insurance, travel, repairs and maintenance, fuel, tires, buses, etc. From the reports mentioned above, budget status reports are compiled by the director of transportation and transportation administrator, and the average monthly expenditure, cumulative monthly expenditure to date, and action plans per cost center needed to maintain their budgets are detailed.

Although the district's mainframe financial and accounting system provides timely budgeting information, this information is not integrated with other transportation systems and data. As previously reported, the automated fueling system is not integrated and therefore the reconciliation of usage versus purchases is not done. In addition, the district uses spread sheets to track the following information:

- student ride times;
- vandalism cases;
- accidents per 100,000 miles;
- staff training and certifications, such as required hours for and scheduling of defensive driver courses;
- employee turnover data; and
- employee details, such as driver accident history and pay increases.

The Personnel Services Department maintains records on substance abuse testing, which is administered randomly to both drivers and attendants. Performance evaluations for each employee are completed annually and are filed in both the employee personnel folder and district's permanent record folder Training staff also summarizes turnover information and maintains lists of new employees on spreadsheets, which are then used to identify turnover trends. The district reviews these trends over time and takes appropriate action to ensure that they remain competitive in their employment practices. .

The district's mainframe financial and accounting system captures all purchasing and use of parts and supplies, but it does not track maintenance expenditures, parts usage per vehicle, or summarize interdepartmental billings. Furthermore, the district has a separate automated system to schedule routine inspections, preventive maintenance, and to describe work performed.

Student transportation staff generates inter-departmental billings every month that represents reimbursable costs for the student transportation budget. Typically, these charges are for vehicle maintenance and fuel expenses. However, these billings are not summarized and reviewed by senior transportation officials as the district does not have an automated vehicle maintenance management system available, nor is its automated fueling system set-up for this function.

The department and the district's Information System (IS) staff regularly review the efficiency of computerized applications within student transportation and assess the need for improvements within budgetary constraints. A computer programmer is assigned to the facilities and transportation area to assist in developing programs or integrate systems. This programmer works with programmers in other areas to coordinate district activities.

The reason the district is not using this best practice is that it needs to substantially improve computer and technology support, including:

- implementing an automated vehicle maintenance management system to improve tracking of itemized maintenance expenditures and other costs per vehicle, parts usage per make or model, life cycle of warranty parts, and mileage per bus (see below); [20]

- maintaining and summarizing billings such as maintenance and fuel to other departments;

- providing fuel consumption data of school buses and other district vehicles based on year, make and model;

- integrating transportation data into the district's mainframe financial and accounting system; and

- consolidating transportation data on a single database within budgetary constraints.

> **We recommend that the district's amended technology plan (see Action Plan 5-1) also address the Transportation Department's technology needs, including modifying the automated fueling system to dispense fuel only if the odometer and bus number is entered and to summarize inter--departmental billings; obtaining an automated vehicle maintenance management system to track maintenance expenditures, parts life cycle, and warranty information; integrating other transportation systems to the district mainframe within budgetary constraints; and to the extent possible consolidating other performance data on one database.**

In addition, the district needs an automated vehicle maintenance management system that can perform the following essential functions:

- track itemized maintenance and other cost per vehicle, [21]

- monitor parts usage per make or model;

- track the life cycle of warranty parts;

- integrate with the fuel system to track gas usage per bus;

- track mileage per bus;

- develop servicing schedules;

- maintain and summarize billings to other departments;

- identify information for all vehicles (including operational status); and

- determine the life cycle of buses and other vehicles.

It is vital for the district to track itemized maintenance and other costs per vehicle to assist in making cost effective department has identified a program it is interested in purchasing. The district should complete the research needed to obtain a program that would satisfy its needs, and should also review all available free software packages. [22] Alternatively, the district should attempt to collaborate with other smaller counties that are looking for improvements in their fleet maintenance programs so as to purchase the software at a discounted price.

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[20] Including labor, tires, other parts, outside repairs, fuel and oil.

[21] Including labor, tires, other parts, outside repairs, fuel and oil.

[22] We are aware of two no cost options that should be evaluated to see if these are appropriate for this district. Hernando County School district developed an internal maintenance tracking system using Access software that is available at no charge. However, this software would not offer updates, adjustments, or support. St. Lucie County School District uses a free software, developed by the manufacturer, International, called "Diamond System" This software tracks parts ordering and maintenance, can accommodate parts for buses made by other manufacturers, and is provided with free installation, training and updates.

The district should also collaborate with Hillsborough County, and learn from its experience in integrating and implementing a fleet maintenance program with their mainframe financial and accounting system. [23] The district can also work with the University of Florida Computer Science program for additional expertise in integrating these systems as needed. This could be mutually beneficial, as Computer Science programs look for opportunities to give students experience in "real-life" situations. Action Plan 9-3 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Action Plan 9-3

We recommend the district conduct a detailed needs assessment for an automated vehicle maintenance management system and obtain a software package that meets the district's needs.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Including all users for input, the district should conduct a detailed assessment of the transportation department's needs for an automated vehicle maintenance management system that includes the following areas: • tracking itemized maintenance and other costs per vehicle[24]; • parts usage per make or model; • tracking the life cycle of warranty parts; • integrating with the fuel system to track gas usage per bus; • tracking mileage per bus; • developing servicing schedules; • maintaining and summarizing billings to other departments; • identifying information for all vehicles (including operational status); • determining the life cycle of buses and other vehicles; • integrating with the district's mainframe system; and • developing key-unit cost indicators and cost analysis of the maintenance function.
	Step 2.	These areas include the required minimum information that the system should be able to track and monitor.
	Step 3.	Develop the minimum specifications for a fleet maintenance program that will address these needs
	Step 4.	Systematically review all available fleet maintenance packages in the market, considering vendor reputation, costs, and problems and benefits experienced by other districts currently using the software.
	Step 5.	Once the district has evaluated all packages, the district should approach other smaller counties that are looking to improve their fleet maintenance program, in order to purchase the software at a discounted price.
	Step 6.	The district should collaborate with Hillsborough County to learn from their recent experience at integrating their fleet maintenance program with the district's main data system. This collaborative should include ongoing discussions regarding successes, problems and solutions, and sending appropriate transportation and IT personnel to Hillsborough County to learn how to test, implement, and integrate the systems.
	Step 7.	The district should also collaborate, as needed, with the University of Florida Computer Science program for added expertise in integrating these systems.
	Step 8.	The director of transportation and executive director of Facilities and Transportation should develop a budget for an automated fleet maintenance management program in the transportation annual budget, including 5 year cost projections and present this information to the capital planning committee.
	Step 9.	The capital planning committee should review the feasibility of all budgets and projections and plan budgeting requirements before submitting these to the superintendent and school board for approval.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Transportation, Executive Director of Facilities and Transportation, Capital Planning Committee, Superintendent, and School Board	
Time Frame	December 2004	

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[23] Hillsborough County uses the same financial and accounting system as Alachua and in December 2002 began using the same fleet management system that Alachua is considering.

[24] Including labor, tires, other parts, outside repairs, fuel and oil.

Best Practice 18: Using

The district monitors the fiscal condition of transportation functions by regularly analyzing expenditures and reviewing them against the budget.

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 will as identifying opportunities to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of operations.

The Alachua County School District's transportation management monitors the department's operations and ensures budgets are not exceeded. Analysis of actual to budgeted expenditures highlights cost control issues which are addressed through action plans. Categorical classification of expenditures is used for decision-making and developing action plans and the budget is divided into categories as prescribed in the Financial and Cost Accounting for Florida Schools publication. When needed, analyses are performed in accordance with the policies established by the chief financial officer. All transportation expenditures are tied to the district's strategic plan, indicating the objective that is supported by each expenditure. The district's mainframe financial and accounting system allows continuous review of budgets, amendments, expenditures, encumbrances, and available balances. This ensures that transportation management can be alerted to unexpected patters of expenditures, increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of operations.

The district has taken advantage of significant opportunities to improve transportation management, increase efficiency and effectiveness, and reduce costs. The district encountered several budget restrictions on future capital and operating expenses for the 2001-02 school year, eliminated seventh period classes and developed staggered school start times in the remote areas. This maximized the use of existing buses and eliminated the need for 18 buses for the 2001-02 school year.

As mentioned in Best Practice 17 of this chapter, the district's mainframe financial and accounting system captures all purchasing and usage of parts and supplies, but it does not track maintenance expenditure and parts usage per vehicle. Consequently, the district cannot identify trends or patterns of maintenance activity, excessive cost, or high costs associated with a particular type or age of bus. Tracking itemized maintenance costs is vital, since districts need this information for strategic decision-making for maintenance and physical needs, including removal and replacement of older buses and privatizing maintenance functions.

Best Practice 19: Not Using

The district has not comprehensively reviewed the prospect for privatizing transportation functions, as a whole or in part.

To be good custodians of public resources, school districts should evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations continually, which includes examining the benefits of alternative service delivery methods, to reduce costs and maximize funds available for classroom instruction, and/or to improve performance. Certain administrative and support functions, including transportation, are more easily privatized due to the limited scope operations and availability of private providers. Therefore, school districts should conduct periodic analyses to determine if they would benefit from privatization of certain aspects of their transportation systems. Privatizing specialized functions such as rebuilding bus transmissions can save districts money by avoiding the need to buy and maintain equipment and skills for a job that will only be used a few times a year. In some cases, districts have privatized their entire

transportation operations and achieved cost savings. However, these steps need to be taken only after "make or buy" analyses are done to ensure that the move will produce real benefits. To conduct these analyses, districts need to identify their unit costs, both direct and indirect, of providing services (such as oil changes, paint and body work, and engine rebuilds) so that they can compare these costs to the prices charged by private vendors.

The Alachua County School District compares on an ad hoc basis, its own costs with those of private vendors to identify maintenance activities that can be performed at a lower cost elsewhere. However, system-wide or routine analysis is conducted. The district has discussed privatizing student transportation functions during a recent school board transportation workshop. However, without key unit cost information, the district can make effective comparisons with private providers.

The district has concluded that certain repair and maintenance jobs including transmission work and radiator rebuilding are more cost effective using local vendors. In these instances, the Transportation Department does not have the facilities, equipment, or knowledge to perform those services. Prior to payment authorization, district staff inspects all maintenance work performed by private vendors.

While the district has taken steps that are consistent with this best practice, it is not using this best practice because reviews have been ad hoc in nature and the district does not collect the cost data needed to conduct a comprehensive analysis. A cost analysis of the district's bus operations and maintenance function would provide the information needed to decide whether or not to outsource any bus operations, partially or completely. As noted previously, before the district can perform such an analysis, the district will have to improve its computer support for the transportation maintenance function and operations and develop unit cost information for maintenance expenditures. The district should thoroughly examine the costs and benefits of contracting, including an accurate computation of the costs of the in-house transportation services and a thorough market analysis of the availability and commitment of outside firms to provide a significant portion of the district's bus services. It would be appropriate for the district to develop a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to determine the market of viable contract bus operation providers followed by a bid process for bus operations. Costs obtained from bids should be regularly be compared to the cost of in-house services. Action Plan 9-4 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Action Plan 9-4

We recommend that the district develop cost information and compare the costs of contracted versus in-house bus operations to guide decision-making on whether to expand contracted services.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Assign the responsibility to develop comparative cost information to the director of transportation
	Step 2.	Implement Recommendation 9-4 to obtain a vehicle maintenance management system. (Best Practice 17 of this chapter)
	Step 3.	Develop a comprehensive analysis of the cost of district in-house bus operations using the automated vehicle maintenance system and other management information systems.
	Step 4.	Conduct a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to determine the market of viable contract bus providers followed by a bid process for bus operations.
	Step 5.	Conduct a comparison of the cost of in-house bus operations to contracting for these services.
	Step 6.	Use the comparative analysis as a basis for expansion or contraction of contracted operations and services
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Facilities and Transportation, Director of Transportation, Information Technology Department,	
Time Frame	June 2004	

Best Practice 20: Not Using

The district has not established an accountability system for transportation, and should regularly track and make public reports on its performance in comparison with established benchmarks.

Like other publicly funded entities, a school district should be held accountable to parents and other taxpayers for the performance and cost of its major programs and support services, including transportation. To accomplish this, each school district should have a system that allows managers at both the district and program level to evaluate performance and make informed decisions regarding the use of limited resources. In addition, school transportation departments need to be able to demonstrate to district management, school boards, and the public that they are good stewards of the public's funds and are constantly striving to improve. This is done by establishing measures, goals, and benchmarks and comparing internal performance to other school districts. Districts should monitor some performance measures on a regular, short-term (e.g., monthly) basis such as the number of bus breakdowns, driver/technician absenteeism, complaints received (e.g., buses not being on time and students not picked up), vehicle maintenance (oil changes, inspections not conducted, etc.) delayed, and overtime paid. Districts should monitor other performance measures on an annual basis, such as the percentage of courtesy students served, annual operational cost per student, vehicle breakdowns per 100,000 miles, the percentage of buses that are spare buses, accidents per million miles, and the percentage of students delivered within established ride time standards. District should compare their performance to those of peer districts as well as against established benchmarks. Transportation department performance should be reported on a regular basis to the district superintendent, school board, and the public.

The Alachua County School District has complied with the Safe Passage Act, s. 229.8348, *Florida Statutes*. This requires each district to adopt School Safety and Security Best Practices and publicly report its implementation and performance. For other activities, student transportation staff informally compares district performance and operational characteristics with other similar districts.

DOE annually compiles uniform information on all districts and issues a report called: Quality Link: Florida School District Transportation Profiles (generally referred to as Q-Link). Q-Link provides many vital statistics about district transportation including: the number of students, number of students transported, number of transportation staff, size of school bus fleet, and annual expenditures. It also provides background information on factors that influence student transportation (such as number of special schools, or whether court-ordered desegregations orders are in effect). For many information categories, Q-Link also ranks district, making it particularly useful for comparison.

Student transportation staff identified six peer school districts (Collier, Lake, St. Lucie, Levy, Clay, and Oklaloosa Counties) for comparison. Staff selected these districts primarily because they have a similar number of buses and students transported. However, other than size of fleet and students transported, these districts have important traits that are very dissimilar to the Alachua County School District. Dissimilarities include:

- the geographic size of the district (square miles that school buses have to travel);
- population density of the district;
- the total number of employees in the transportation department;
- the district's total population and student enrollment;
- number of magnet school programs; and
- court ordered or district ordered busing for desegregation.

The transportation department should select comparable districts not only in terms of number of students served and bus fleet size, but also in terms of geographic size and challenges (coastal nature), population density (urban and rural), and the number of magnet versus other countywide schools. The district should

also select at least two peers that operate exemplary transportation programs. This will ensure that the department is not only measuring itself against districts with similar characteristics, but will give the department insight into new commendable practices that have been implemented in similar districts. Suggested counties for comparison are listed in Exhibit 9-17. The review team noted that the district should perform such a review on all of the following counties, which do have similar traits in important functional areas.

Exhibit 9-17
School Districts With Transportation Department Characteristics Similar to Alachua

School Districts Similar to Alachua	Similar Functional Areas
Bay County	Geographic size; population density, total student population and student enrolment; size of bus fleet
Hernando County	Population density; transportation staff positions; mileage per year; size of bus fleet; district imposed busing
Leon County	Geographic size; population density, transportation staff positions; total student population and student enrollment; number of magnet schools and countywide transported schools; mileage per year; size of bus fleet
Manatee County	Geographic size; population density, transportation staff positions; total student population and student enrollment; mileage per year; size of bus fleet; district imposed busing
Osceola County	Transportation staff positions; total student population and student enrollment; mileage per year; size of bus fleet
Santa Rosa County	Geographic size; transportation staff positions; total student population and student enrollment; mileage per year; size of bus fleet
Sarasota County	Transportation staff positions; total student population and student enrollment; number of magnet schools and countywide transported schools; mileage per year; size of bus fleet
Volusia County	Geographic size; population density, number of magnet schools and countywide transported schools; mileage per year; size of bus fleet; exemplary county – bus occupancy index (99)

Source: Q-Link: Florida School District Transportation Profiles, 2002, for 2000-01, DOE.

The district is not using this best practice for the following two reasons. First, while the student transportation program has a clearly defined mission statement and goals, it has not developed these goals into measurable objectives. The mission statement and goals reflect the intent of the program but do not include appropriate benchmarks to measure the efficiency and expenditures of the program. District staff indicated that it measures its goals by responses from parents, the community, and staff. However, these responses are not logged and summarized as part of management information and feedback is only one aspect of an accountability system.

Second, although the district compares *Q-link information* to selected peer districts and peer district averages, the district has not developed separate justifiable benchmarks based on the characteristics of the Alachua County School District. Benchmarks are expectations of how well an activity or function, such as student transportation, should be performed. When a public entity tracks its actual performance against a benchmark over time, it can use this information to monitor performance, improve program operations, and to provide accountability to the public. One of the results of omitting such an important element of managerial responsibility is that key information on performance and costs are not monitored consistently over time. This limits staff's ability to provide the superintendent and school board with objective information on the performance and cost-efficiency of the student transportation program. Possible performance measures, which should be reported annually, are provided in Chapter 3, Performance Accountability in Best Practice 1, and the district should implement Action Plan 3-1, which outlines steps to implement a performance accountability system. Finally, the district should compare its performance to peer districts with similar characteristics as Alachua. Action Plan 9-5 includes the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 9-5

We recommend that the district implement a performance accountability system, as outlined in Action Plan 3-1 and compare its performance to peer districts that are similar demographically.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop an accountability system as outlined in Action Plan 3-1.
	Step 2.	Select peer districts that are similar to the Alachua County School District.
	Step 3.	Review other school Florida school districts to identify those that have transportation programs and are demographically similar to the Alachua County School District. This criteria should consider:
		▪ the number of students served;
		▪ the size of the bus fleet;
		▪ the average bus occupancy;
		▪ the population density of the district;
		▪ the size and nature the county (e.g. rural, coastal);
		▪ the average mileage per year; and
		▪ the number of magnet school programs and other county wide programs.
	Step 4.	Begin collecting and monitoring data related to transportation from existing data on the district's and peer performance
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Facilities and Transportation, Director of Transportation	
Time Frame	June 2004	

10 Food Service Operations

Summary

The Alachua County School District is using 7 of 11 best practices for food service operations. The food service program has developed comprehensive procedures manuals, performs sound cash and account management, optimizes its financial opportunities, uses some measures and benchmarks to evaluate program performance, complies with federal, state, and district policies, and takes steps to ensure customer needs are met. To use the remaining four best practices, the food service program should develop clearly stated goals and objectives, clarify its leadership and organizational structure and responsibilities, systematically identify training needs to improve use of limited training resources, and develop performance standards that can be used to improve and direct program changes and increase efficiencies.

As seen in 10-1, the district has two opportunities to reduce costs in this area. Determining whether to take advantage of these opportunities is a district decision and should be based on many factors including district needs, public input, and school board priorities. If the district implements the action plan, it would be able to redirect the funds to other priorities, such as putting more money into the classroom or addressing deficiencies identified in this report.

Exhibit 10-1
Our Review Identified Two Opportunities for the District To Reduce Costs

| Best Practice Number		Fiscal Impact: Cost Savings					
		Year 2003-04	Year 2004-05	Year 2005-06	Year 2006-07	Year 2007-08	Total
2	Implement shared manager program	$26,150	$52,300	$78,450	$104,600	$130,750	$392,250
2	Increase Meal Per Labor Hour Standard	0	$27,000	$54,000	$81,000	$108,000	$270,000
	Total	**$26,150**	**$79,300**	**$132,450**	**$185,600**	**$238,750**	**$662,250**

Background

The Alachua County School District's food service program provided approximately 4.6 million meals during the 2001-02 school year. In doing so, the program produced approximately 1 million breakfasts, 2.6 million lunches, and sold the equivalent of 997,000 meals in the form of a la carte items. The program provided meal services at 39 schools and 15 satellite locations and employed 267 full-time and 36 part-time food service staff at these 54 locations plus 7 staff members at the central office. The food service budget for the 2002-03 school year was approximately $10.2 million.

The district's food service director is responsible for all aspects of the food service program, including managing food service staff on-site at each school. The current food service director has been overseeing the program for eight years.

Program organization

The program lines of authority are typical for most district food service operations. The food service director also oversees procurement and warehouse operations, but his main focus is the business aspect of the food services program. As shown below in Exhibit 10-2, the director reports to the deputy superintendent for planning, budgeting, and system accountability and shares the responsibility of supervising all of the cafeteria managers. The district food service central office staff consists of seven people. School site staff include one manager, one assistant manager (depending on school size), and 5-7 full and/or part-time employees.

Exhibit 10-2
Food Service Organizational Chart (July 2003)
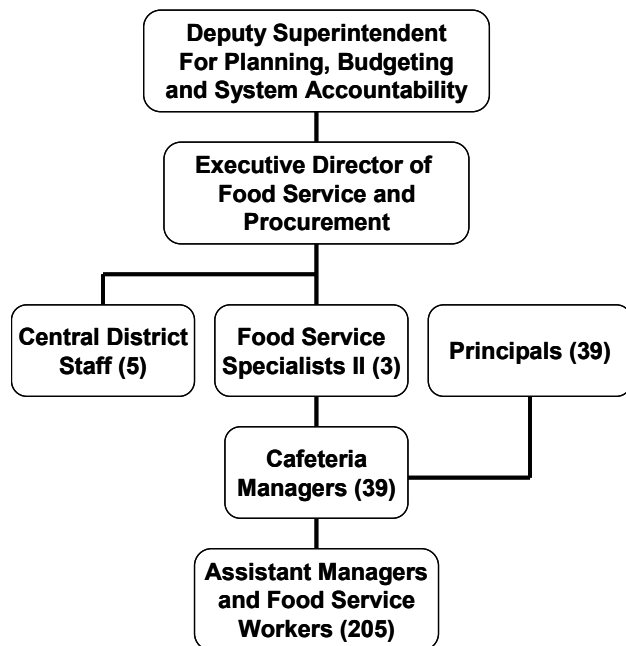
Source: Alachua County School District Food Service

National School Lunch Program Participation

The district participates in the National School Lunch Program 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.

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 11-3 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, Alachua County School District receives the $0.22 reimbursement rate. Students pay the full, reduced, or receive a free meal 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 Alachua County School District has opted to offer breakfast to its middle and high school students.

Exhibit 10-4
Although the District's Food Service Program
Remains Financially Sound Recent Trends Need to be Monitored Closely

	Fiscal Year				
	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02
REVENUE					
Food Sales Revenue					
Federal Meals Program	$5,585,423	$5,738,235	$5,529,519	$5,757,301	$5,723,541
State Supplement	286,605	268,824	255,927	253,589	258,231
Meal Sales	1,293,995	1,338,619	1,327,890	1,362,773	1,330,155
A La Carte Sales	1,453,274	1,677,487	1,837,170	1,993,199	2,017,879
Other Food Sales	163,247	52,491	55,439	12,545	152,931
Other Revenue					
USDA Donated Food	550,573	540,769	528,396	506,335	303,687
Interest	61,091	79,853	83,396	53,045	33,624
Other Revenue	7,107	178,009	259	129,523	268,426
Total Revenue	**$9,401,313**	**$9,821,795**	**$9,617,997**	**$10,068,310**	**$9,935,543**
EXPENDITURES					
Salaries	$3,013,512	$3,110,127	$3,227,089	$3,552,756	$3,694,379
Employee Benefits	1,221,099	1,207,407	1,062,440	1,122,053	1,181,901
Purchased Services	171,676	177,346	229,111	225,497	290,388
Energy Services	18	526	601	823	125,887
Material and supplies	4,020,268	4,117,798	4,338,992	4,407,538	4,482,313
Capital Outlay	219,772	219,849	138,014	161,055	116,855
Other Expenses	389,475	375,320	237,177	86,039	241,803
Total Expenditures	**$9,035,819**	**$9,208,373**	**$9,233,423**	**$9,555,760**	**$10,133,526**
Net Income (Loss)	**365,494**	**613,422**	**384,573**	**512,550**	**(197,983)**
Transfers In/(Out)	**(400,000)**	**(415,000)**	**(400,000)**	**(281,711)**	**(250,344)**
Fund Balance	**$2,029,099**	**$2,227,521**	**$2,212,094**	**$2,442,934**	**$1,994,606**

Source: Alachua County School District, 1997-02.

Activities of particular interest

North Florida Buying Group Development

The food service director has developed the North Florida Buying Group to obtain the best prices for mainline food items. Its primary purpose was to bring together mid to small size school districts to pool resources and improve economies of scale, resulting in lower product costs with higher standards of product quality. The buying group originated in Alachua, which also serves as the host bid district, and is in its early development. The district first partnered with Putnam County and invited commercial distributors to bid on services to purchase and distribute food and supplies to 54 schools (39 in Alachua and 15 in Putnam). The group currently includes fourteen north Florida school districts. This group also developed strategies to apply their pooled resources toward acquiring a larger volume of USDA commodity processed products. The food service director also applied for a State Administrative Grant (SAE) to document the buying group's development and to establish a model that could be used by other districts.

Career Ladder

Several years ago, there was no organized approach to deal with the training needs of school food services personnel. A limited number of on-the-job training activities were provided, but were not specific to assessed needs or level of employee classification. Little or no staff development dollars were spent (nor is there currently) in direct support of food service training activities. The Alachua County School District food service's Career Ladder program has attempted to provide organization and structure and to apply available training resources specific to employee levels from the point of pre-service to the manager level. The plan makes training opportunities available to help an employee advance skill levels to support in-house promotion from entry level to management. The majority of the management appointments have been from employees who have made their way through at least one step in the Career Ladder. Food service is the only department within the district that has such a structured program.

Conclusion and Recommendations —————

Summary of Conclusions for Personnel Systems and Benefits Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
Planning, Organization, and Staffing	1. The program has developed strategic or operational plans that are consistent with district plans and the program budget, and approved by the district.	No	10-8
	2. The district and program are organized with clear lines of responsibility and in a manner that provides the food service program sufficient authority to succeed.	No	10-10
	3. Program management has developed training designed to meet basic program needs as well as improve food services, both based on a needs assessment.	No	10-14
Management	4. Program management has developed comprehensive procedures manuals that are kept current.	Yes	10-15
	5. The district performs sound cash and account management.	Yes	10-16
	6. District and program management optimizes its financial opportunities.	Yes	10-17
Performance and Accountability	7. Food service program management has developed comprehensive performance and cost-efficiency measures that provide management with information to evaluate program performance and better manage operations.	No	10-19
	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	10-19
	9. District and program administrators effectively manage costs of the food service program and use performance measures, benchmarks, and budgets on a regular basis to evaluate performance and use the analysis for action or change.	Yes	10-20
	10. The food service program and district complies with federal, state, and district policy.	Yes	10-21
	11. The district conducts activities to ensure that customer needs are met and acts to improve services and food quality where needed.	Yes	10-22

PLANNING, ORGANIZING, AND STAFFING

Best Practice 1: Not Using

The food service program developed a draft food service plan consistent with the district plan, but needs to further develop and obtain broad approval.

The school district and its food service program should have coordinated, approved plans that give the program a logical direction. These plans should include a mission statement, goals, objectives, and strategies that describe what the program desires to accomplish. However, the extensiveness of such plans may differ 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 Alachua County School District food services program developed a strategic plan during the course of this review. It is consistent with the district strategic plan and program mission statement and covers most program level strategic issues and program activities.

However, the district is not using this best practice for two reasons. First, the goals and the objectives should be further developed to ensure they are measurable and the plan should be used to assist in developing the food service budget. The goals in the new food service plan are written as if they have already been accomplished and the objectives are not stated in measurable and quantifiable terms (see Exhibit 10-5 for examples). The district's food service strategic plan should also include fiscal goals so the district can assess whether the program's fiscal status is in line with expected performance levels. Once goals are measurable, the budget should be developed to support attaining these objectives. Currently, budget projections are derived from historical revenues and expenditures. Future budgets should include enrollment forecasts, participation rates, and estimated costs of future projects necessary replacement equipment, computer hardware and software, and other expected expenditures. A food service strategic plan, with fiscal goals and objectives, will allow the district to better gauge program performance. We recommend that the food service program should further develop its plan and program measures. Action Plan 10-1 describes the steps to address this issue.

Exhibit 10-5
Food Service Strategic Plan Goals And Objectives Are Not Measurable

Alachua County School District Strategies (Action Plans)	Food Service Program Goals	Objectives
Provide staff with the tools essential to effective performance of their assigned responsibilities.	The Food Service Program has implemented accountability and financial mechanisms that ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of all operational areas.	Increase worker productivity while improving staff morale at district office and school food operations.
Make students, parents, teachers, and other staff, aware of the impact of nutrition on student achievement.	The Food Service Program prepares and serves nutritious meals with minimum waste, which are well received by students and staff.	Develop a quality and quantity control monitoring program for breakfast, lunch, and snack type meals.
Upgrade facilities throughout the district to assure that all schools have comparable working conditions for students and staff.	The Food Service Program provides meal services	Coordinate a plan with the Risk Management Department that insures a safe work Environment for all food service employees.

Source: Alachua County School District, 2003.

Action Plan 10-1

We recommend that the food service program establish clearly stated goals and measurable objectives for the food service program that reflect the expected outcomes and expenditures of the program.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop clearly stated goals and measurable objectives using examples in Exhibit 3-4 in Performance Accountability for guidance.
	Step 2.	Collect stakeholder input.
	Step 3.	Solicit specific input and approval from district administrators.
	Step 4.	Use the approved plan to develop the food service program annual budget and annually assess program performance.
Who Is Responsible	Food Service Director	
Time Frame	August 2004	

Second, the food service director should review new kitchen design and renovation plans associated with major capital projects funded by the program, including new kitchen design or renovation. In the last 10 years the district built three new schools with kitchen facilities and renovated 10 other school kitchens. However, the district does not routinely involve the food service director in reviewing kitchen design plans. Review by the food service director should ensure appropriate facilities are provided for the efficient and effective operation of the program. The district should include the food services program director in future renovation or design plans.

> **We recommend that the food service director have a formal role in approving kitchen design plans. The Facilities Construction Chapter, Best Practice 1 outlines a role for the food service director as part of the planning committee and Action Plan 7-1 provides the steps for conducting post-occupancy evaluations, which should include feedback from food services staff.**

Best Practice 2: Not Using

The district and the food service program are not organized with clear lines of responsibility and without sufficient authority to influence success.

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.

The Alachua County School District recognizes the food services program as part of the district's organization and grants it the authority to fulfill its responsibilities. The food service program developed an accurate organization chart of the program over the course of this review, which depicts cafeteria personnel reporting to both the on site principal and the food service director (see Exhibit 10-2). Responsibilities such as hiring, firing, review, and evaluation practices of cafeteria personnel are shared.

However, the district is not using this best practice for three reasons. First, the food services program lacks clear lines of responsibility over daily operations and does not participate in decisions that could affect the program's success. The district has a dual reporting structure, with the cafeteria managers directly supervised by principals, but the food service director is responsible for the overall program's success. This arrangement has created some difficulties in administering the district's food service program. These problems include:

- school principals make decisions regarding the selection of a-la-carte items to be offered, which can adversely affect participation rates;

- school principals and the food service director work informally to address and resolve issues of mutual concern, but there is no formal process to insure cooperation; and

- school principals and the food service director report to different assistant superintendents so there is no mechanism to appeal to a single authority for resolution of disagreements.

Furthermore, organizationally, the food service program director does not routinely participate in decisions that can affect program success. For example, the food service director should be involved in district and school level committees that make decisions that impact the food service operation such as lunch periods, bell scheduling, vending machine operations, and nutritional education. Instead, principals decide and adjust lunch periods. However, too short a lunch period can negatively impact participation rates and result in students not getting an opportunity to eat. School based decisions to operate non-compliant vending machines during serving hours can also affect participation rates and the efficient and effective operation of the food service program. Action Plan 10-2 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Action Plan 10-2

We recommend that the district revise the job description of the food service director to include having primary responsibility over the food service program with input from the school principals. Also, the district should consider establishing a formal advisory role for the food service director to assist in district and school level decisions that impact the food service program.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Revise the job description of the food services director to provide sole authority over school cafeteria personnel.
	Step 2.	Ensure that the food services director involves school principals in assessing school cafeteria operations and cafeteria manager evaluations.
	Step 3.	The district should consider a policy to involve the food service director as an advisory in district and school level decisions that impact the food service program, such as lunch periods, bell schedules, and bus arrival times.
Who Is Responsible	Food Services Director, Human Resources Director, Deputy Superintendent for Student and Community Services	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Second, the district can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of school cafeterias and the food service program by considering the development of a shared manager program. For over three years, the Broward County School District food service program has successfully used shared managers to operate school cafeterias. Shared managers split their time between two schools in close proximity. A designated "key person" can be left in charge to handle emergencies in the absence of the manager. The district benefits by only having to pay the salary and fringe benefits for one employee while getting shared supervision across two school locations. By phasing out two cafeteria managers each year over five years, the district could save approximately $812,250. [1] However, there would be some offsetting costs associated with this plan. Incentive pay to shared managers for these additional duties would likely increase the shared manager's salaries by an average of about $5,000 each or $150,000 over five years. Also, managers typically perform non-management functions that would need to be assumed by remaining staff. The district estimates it will need additional 5 hours to replace manager time currently performing food service work duties such as preparing and serving food at a cost of about $90,000 over five years. [2] Exhibit 10-6 shows the net estimated five-year savings at $392,250.

Exhibit 10-6
Five Year Projected Shared Manager Program Savings

	Fiscal Year					
	Year 2003-04	Year 2004-05	Year 2005-06	Year 2006-07	Year 2007-08	Total
Average Cafeteria Manager Salary and Benefit Savings	$54,150	$108,300	$162,450	$216,600	$270,750	$812,250
Incentive Pay Cost	(10,000)	(20,000)	(30,000)	(40,000)	(50,000)	(150,000)
Cafeteria Worker Cost1	(18,000)	(36,000)	(54,000)	(72,000)	(90,000)	(270,000)
Total	**$26,150**	**$52,300**	**$78,450**	**$104,600**	**$130,750**	**$392,250**

[1] Additional cafeteria worker hours are needed to assume non-administrative functions previously provided by the cafeteria manager, however, any supervisory or oversight support provided in the absence of the manager should be considered training for future responsibility and should not be an additional cost to the district.

Source: ValienteHernandez P.A. analysis, 2003.

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[1] The average salary and benefits of cafeteria managers within the district is $27,075. Estimate is based on a cumulative of two mangers each year, or $54,150 added savings each year.

[2] The average hourly salary and benefits of cafeteria workers within the district is $10.01.

Efforts should be made to encourage high performing managers to take on the shared manager roles when existing managers retire. Shared management is most feasible at smaller schools, or where participation might be low. The criteria for choosing schools that would benefit from having shared managers are multi-faceted and should consider the following:

- schools should be located within approximately five miles of each other so the manger can reach either school quickly if unexpected problems arise;

- total meals served at the two schools should be at a volume that is manageable by a single manager; and

- the manager should be willing to and capable of taking on the additional duties.

In discussion with the executive director of Food Services, an attainable goal of at least two shared managers per year is considered feasible. The proposed increase in shared managers should be accomplished through natural attrition and not through a reduction in staff. If turnover is low or participation levels increase, shifting to two shared managers annually may not be feasible. Action Plan 10-3 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

Action Plan 10-3

We recommend the food service program develop a shared manager program for cafeteria managers.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	The food service director identifies at least two sets of schools in close proximity that would be suitable for shared management and at least two existing managers that would be suitable
	Step 2.	When vacancies at the manager level occur, the identified managers should be encouraged to participate and be presented with facts concerning the increased pay responsibilities that go along with shared management. The food service director should attempt to fill the vacancies with shared managers.
	Step 3.	If successful, during the 2002-03 school year efforts should continue as attrition allows to average converting two shared manager positions each year thereafter. Successful implementation also depends on enough schools in close proximity to become available and enough managers leaving through natural attrition.
Who Is Responsible	Food Service Director	
Time Frame	August of each year, as manager vacancies occur	

Third, although the district reviews staffing needs for each cafeteria in October and again in February, staffing levels exceed recommended industry standards. Exhibit 10-7 shows the district's average meal equivalents served, the districts meals per labor hour and the industry standards. [3] While some school sites are below industry standards for meals per labor hour, (e.g. Foster Elementary), overall, the district's staffing includes approximately 119 hours more per day than what the industry standard. The district should move toward raising its meal per labor hour toward the industry standard, setting a preliminary goal of reducing staffing from 119 hours over the industry standard to no more than 60 hours. The district should use natural attrition to reach this standard. In addition, the district can determine whether any redistribution or reallocation of personnel across sites will improve the overall efficiency of the food service program. Action Plan 10-4 includes the steps needed to address this issue.

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[3] Meal equivalents include complete meals or $3.00 worth of al la carte items or 3 breakfast meals.

Exhibit 10-7
Meals Per Labor Hours Exceed Industry Standards

School	Average Meal Equivalents Served	District MPLH	Industry Standard MPLH [1]	Average Hours Worked	Allowed Hours at Standard MPLH	Hours Above (Below) Standard
Duval Elementary	394	17.1	18	23.04	21.9	1.15
Finley Elementary	732	16.3	20	44.91	36.6	8.31
Foster Elementary	354	16.9	16	20.95	22.1	(1.18)
Lake Forest Elementary	521	17.4	18	29.94	28.9	1.00
Littlewood Elementary	475	16.8	18	28.27	26.4	1.88
Metcalfe Elementary	604	15.6	19	38.72	31.8	6.93
Williams Elementary	500	16.7	18	29.94	27.8	2.16
Alachua Elementary	368	17.5	16	21.03	23.0	(1.97)
Archer Elementary	398	17.3	16	23.01	24.9	(1.87)
Shell Elementary	353	15.1	16	23.38	22.1	1.31
Waldo Elementary	260	15.8	15	16.46	17.3	(0.88)
Terwilliger Elementary	522	19.3	18	27.05	29.0	(1.95)
Idylwild Elementary	641	16.2	19	39.57	33.7	5.83
Glen Springs Elementary	355	17.8	16	19.94	22.2	(2.24)
Rawlings Elementary	738	18.1	20	40.77	36.9	3.87
Prairie View Elementary	483	16.3	18	29.63	26.8	2.80
Hidden Oak Elementary	616	20.5	19	30.05	32.4	(2.37)
Wiles Elementary	549	18.8	18	29.20	30.5	(1.30)
Lawton Chiles Elementary	465	16.3	18	28.53	25.8	2.69
Newberry Elementary	500	19.3	18	25.91	27.8	(1.87)
Norton Elementary	455	18.3	18	24.86	25.3	(0.41)
Talbot Elementary	487	19	18	25.63	27.1	(1.42)
Irby Elementary	441	15.7	18	28.09	24.5	3.59
Lanier Center	255	17	15	15.00	17.0	(2.00)
Loften Center	177	16.3	12	10.86	14.8	(3.89)
Lincoln Middle	720	15.8	20	45.57	36.0	9.57
Bishop Middle	911	16.1	22	44.72	32.7	11.99
Westwood Middle	690	15.1	19	60.33	47.9	12.38
Mebane Middle	418	16.9	18	40.83	38.3	2.50
Kanapaha Middle	596	17.6	18	23.75	23.2	0.53
Spring Hill Middle	677	14.5	19	41.10	31.4	9.74
Ft. Clarke Middle	762	20	20	33.85	33.9	0.00
Oakview Middle	470	15.1	18	50.46	42.3	8.13
Gainesville High	842	17.9	21	26.26	22.4	3.88
Hawthorne High	475	16.4	18	28.96	26.4	2.57
Newberry High	374	13.8	16	27.10	23.4	3.73
Santa Fe High	636	14	19	45.43	33.5	11.95
Eastside High	735	13.9	20	52.88	36.8	16.13
Buchholz High	956	16.5	19	57.94	50.3	7.62
Totals	**20,905**			**12,539.91**		**118.89**

[1] Industry standards are based on a low productivity convenience system using maximum amount of processed foods (for example, using all bakery breads, pre-fried chicken, and proportioned condiments and washing trays or using disposable dinnerware).

Source: Alachua County School District, 2003.

If the district reallocated its daily labor hours by reducing the number of hours worked, the annual savings would be approximately $108,000 per year ($10.00 average cafeteria worker salary and benefit cost per hour x 60 hours x 180 days.). [4] This reduction should be phased in over the four years after an initial adjustment year. Thus, no savings would be realized in the first or transition year, $27,000 second year, $54,000 third year, $81,000 fourth year, $108,000 fifth year, for a five year savings combined savings of $270,000.

Action Plan 10-4

We recommend that the district increase meals per labor hour standards to comply with industry standards to reduce labor costs and increase the meal equivalency standards.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	The food service director develops efficient meals per labor hour standards using appropriate industry standards as guidelines.
	Step 2.	Use updated meal equivalency standards for calculating meals served.
	Step 3.	Implement appropriate meals per labor hours standards to direct staffing and reduce overall labor costs
	Step 4.	Monitor schools on a quarterly basis to ensure standards are being met.
Who Is Responsible	Food Service Director	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Best Practice 3: Not Using

The food service program has developed training to meet basic needs, but it has not used readily available information to systematically identify training needs to allocate resources.

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 1responsibility of the food service director and cafeteria managers. All districts should be taking advantage of training materials available from DOE.

The Alachua County School District food service program established and follows a formal food service staff-training plan with the assistance of a training specialist, director, and other food services staff. This plan is comprehensive with clearly defined objectives for each staff level. The training program begins when an employee is hired and continues throughout her/his career. Additionally, the food service program has developed a career ladder that defines levels of training and a specified "career path" for employee advancement with full implementation expected by the 2003-04 school year.

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[4] An initial target is to reduce by half the excess hours worked compared to industry standard, from 119 to 60. If the district can reduce the excess hours to a level comparable to industry standards, greater costs savings could be achieved. In addition, by using several years to phase in the reduced number of hours used to produce meals, the district should see its MPLH decrease incrementally, yielding incremental savings. For example, in year 2 the savings would be $10 salary/benefit costs X 15 hours X 180 days = $27,000 savings.

However, to use this best practice, the district should expand its efforts to ensure that all food service training needs are identified and take steps to offer needed training. Currently, the personnel department surveys food service employees to determine their training needs. The survey collects general suggestions and ideas to improve services. However, the district does not incorporate other sources of information that would be useful for identifying training needs. For example, the district's recent Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) audit identified several problems that training could address, such as storing inventory in a orderly manner, with pack dates clearly visible to insure proper usage and accountability. DACS was found that commodity storage was disorganized. This increases the potential for food losses, hinders first-in, first-out practices and makes accurate inventories difficult. Other information sources for training needs include supervisor reviews, county health inspection reports, CRE, SMI, and USDA audit results, customer satisfaction, employee annual evaluations, internal audit results, and workers' compensation claims. Information from all of these sources should be complied and analyzed to identify problem areas and develop appropriate training. The food service program should develop a systematic process to identify training needs. Action Plan 10-5 describes the steps needed to address this issue.

Action Plan 10-5

We recommend that the food service program develop a systematic process to identify training needs.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop a tracking system that includes, but is not limited to area supervisor reviews, county health inspection reports, CRE, SMI, and USDA audit results, customer satisfaction, employee annual evaluations, internal audit results, and workers' compensation claims to identify potential training needs.
	Step 2.	Rank order identified training needs to allocate training resources.
	Step 3.	Create a staff development plan based on this comprehensive needs assessment that includes training goals and objectives linked to program performance.
	Step 4.	Periodically assess of how effective training programs are in meeting goals and objectives and revise training program accordingly.
Who Is Responsible	Food Service Director, Personnel Services Director	
Time Frame	December 2004	

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 Alachua County School District food service program established a comprehensive food service policies and procedures manual. It is available to all school cafeteria managers, principals, and the director of every department that interacts with food services. The manual clearly states what is expected

of food service personnel and has background information about the National School Lunch Program, general and district policies, meal and cash accountability procedures, purchasing and inventory procedures, training, and equipment and facility management. During our site visits, food service managers stated that the manual is very useful. Our observations also confirmed that managers routinely use the manual. Evidence indicates that a routine five year review occurs to ensure that the policy and procedures manual is current and complete and other updates or new materials are added as-needed. Managers are notified in writing of pertinent updates as well as the five year revisions. In addition, the food services program uses various other manuals to assist with day-to-day operations. The manuals are updated annually.

Although the district is using this best practice, the policies and procedures manual does not specifically state how to control the sale of food and beverages items that can compete with the district approved food service program. This could potentially result in noncompliance with federal and state regulations.

> **We recommend that the district include more detail in its procedures regarding the sale of competitive foods.**

Best Practice 5: Using

The district performs sound cash and account management, but the food service program lacks a comprehensive cash flow plan to ensure the program remains solvent.

School districts should run the food service program much like a business, ensuring that it remains in a healthy financial position, pays its share of operating expenses, and maintains a reserve fund balance within legal limitations to protect it from unanticipated emergencies. At a minimum, district management should require the food program to be self-sufficient by paying all appropriate direct and indirect expenses so that it does not drain general revenue dollars from the classroom. Management should also ensure that program account balances, plans, and budgets support future self-sufficiency. Districts of all sizes should make prompt requests for payment to the federal National School Lunch Program because payments are so substantial they affect cash management and interest income.

The Alachua County School District food service program suffered a loss in fiscal year 2001-02, but still remains in a healthy financial position. The unreserved cash fund balance, established to protect the program from unanticipated emergencies is appropriate and is in line with the benchmark established by the Department of Education. During this review, the food service program developed a five year cash flow plan with a goal to reach an established net cash resources benchmark to ensure it will avoid needing general fund monies.

Although the district is using this best practice, it could enhance the use of this best practice in two was. First, the newly developed cash flow plan is not comprehensive and excludes major planned capital expenditures such as the district's decision to convert to a new computer software system. The cash flow plan should be expanded to include this information.

> **We recommend that the food service program develop a more comprehensive cash flow plan to include all major revenues and expenses using reasonable estimates to ensure adequate cash reserves are maintained.**

Second, the food service program could further refine its accounting methodology for direct and indirect expenses. The food services program currently pays for the majority of the program's operating costs (e.g., salaries and benefits of workers, food, food service equipment maintenance, and janitorial support),

much of the federally approved and other indirect costs (e.g. administrative costs and finance employee costs), and it helps fund capital projects and equipment purchases for food service. The district should be commended for attempting to account for most of the food services costs. However, there are some additional costs that could be covered by the food service program, some of which are difficult to accurately allocate the percentage of cost and may depend on other departments to determine the amount of food service's share. These include trash removal, plumbing and HVAC maintenance, and vehicle costs associated with transporting food. Food service programs operate like business entities and should be accountable for all operating costs. Therefore the district should continue to refine its methodology to assess any fees for activities not currently charged to the program. The fiscal impact of this recommendation will be neutral to the district however, it could represent some increase in costs to the food services program.

> **We recommend that the district continue to refine its methodology to assure it fully accounts for costs associated with food services and charges the food service program the full costs of its operations.**

Best Practice 6: Using

District and program management optimize financial opportunities when possible.

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 Alachua County School District food service program has taken a number of steps to optimize its financial opportunities. The food service program provides meals at several alternative sites including day care programs, head start programs, and charter schools to generate additional sources of income. In addition, meals are served during summer and at after school programs. Breakfast programs are offered in all schools. The district uses vending services to supplement food services income. It was noted during our site visit that vending machines located inside the cafeterias offered foods with the required nutritional value. Also, the district typically receives $200,000 in excess of its full allocation of federally donated foods except in 2001-02 when it lost $12,000. The food service program participates in commodity processing to maximize its allocation and considers purchased food prices when developing commodity allocation orders.

In addition, while the district had required each student to apply for free or reduced priced meals, during the course of this review, the district agreed with our recommendation to change to a family application. This recommendation is based on the fact that secondary school students tend to not apply for free or reduced price meals, even when eligible. However, if one family member qualifies for free or reduced lunch then the siblings automatically qualify. This will increase free and reduced lunch eligibility and potentially increase participation.

While the district is using this best practice it could enhance its operations in two ways. First, the food service program contracts with consultants to evaluate core functions such as warehousing and

procurement. However, it does not formally assess the risks of its core functions to identify areas for review. Areas such as delivery, management, energy, and courier services have not recently been reviewed. Although the district is using this best practice, it can enhance its operations in this area by improving its review schedule of core functions.

> **We recommend that the food service program enhance food service program core functions reviews to include a schedule and risk assessment to ensure all key areas are reviewed.**

Second, the district has not compared its meal prices to other districts. Exhibit 10-8 compares the district's meal prices versus its peer districts. While district meal prices have not increased in over ten years, it still charges more for its full-priced lunch and breakfast than peer districts. Peer comparisons should be continued, especially while considering future budgets and the district anticipated needs for equipment replacement, computer software or hardware purchases, and other program needs. During the course of this review, the food service program contracted with a consultant who recommended a la carte pricing of all items in adult meals. In consideration of future expenses the district can, as an alternative to charging a la carte prices for all items in an adult meal, set adult meal prices to cover full average meal production costs. [5] Considering the district's relatively high lunch and breakfast prices, its current surplus of funds and future plans to use these funds, the district should analyze its pricing policies and monitor its financial conditions annually.

Exhibit 10-8
Meal Price Comparisons for 2002-2003

District	Lunch				Breakfast			
	Elementary	**Middle**	**High**	**Adult**	**Elementary**	**Middle**	**High**	**Adult**
Alachua	**$1.50**	**$1.65**	**$1.65**	**$2.00**	**$1.00**	**$1.00**	**$1.00**	**$1.25**
Bay	1.50	1.75	1.75	3.00	0.75	1.00	1.00	1.25
Collier	1.50	1.75	1.75	2.50	0.75	0.85	0.85	1.25
Lake	1.25	1.50	1.50	2.00	0.75	1.00	1.00	1.10
Marion	1.35	1.50	1.50	2.05	0.95	0.95	0.95	1.20
St. Lucie	1.25	1.50	1.50	2.00	0.60	0.60	0.60	1.00
Peer Average	**$1.37**	**$1.60**	**$1.60**	**$2.31**	**$0.76**	**$0.88**	**$0.88**	**$1.16**

Source: Florida Department of Education Food and Nutrition Management, NSLP Claims/Applications 2002-03 and ValienteHernandez, P.A. calculations, 2003.

> **We recommend that the food service program regularly compare its meal prices to peer districts, include pricing considerations when developing a comprehensive budget, and raise paid adult meal prices to cover the full cost of producing the meal.**

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[5] The food service program provided information that current average meal production costs are approximately $2.11, or a loss of $0.11 per meal when sold to an adult.

PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Best Practice 7: Not Using

The food service program has made some efforts to improve its performance measurement system, but it has not yet developed a comprehensive set of performance and cost-efficiency measures.

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.

The Alachua County School District food service program conducts some limited review of operations to assist in managing school-level operations, such as meals per labor hour, salaries plus benefits margin (lunch and breakfast), participation rates, but the district does not use a sound methodology to develop performance and cost efficiency measure benchmarks, such as historical performance and comparison with peers to integrate program changes.   The district should also review its performance and cost efficiency and benchmarks periodically to ensure its reliability and relevance. The food services program cannot provide management with enough information to evaluate program performance for improving operations. During the course of this review, the food service program contracted for a comprehensive reporting and benchmarking system to improve its performance measurement reporting, but has not yet implemented it.   The district's food services program should develop and implement a comprehensive performance accountability system to help guide improvements and program change. Action Plan 3-1, Performance Accountability, shows the necessary steps needed to develop and implement a performance measurement 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 Alachua County School District food service program annually evaluates each service site. The evaluation includes inspection of the site's facilities and procedures. Storerooms, cooking equipment, work areas, and chemical supplies are inspected and rated either satisfactory or unsatisfactory requiring follow-up. Procedures to verify temperatures of stored foods, following menus, using correct portion

sizes, sanitation, safety, thawing methods, and adherence to competitive foods and vending rules are also evaluated. Additionally, the district analyzes each site's performance against set expectations for meals per labor hour, meal participation rates, and costs per meal on a quarterly basis. Those areas requiring follow-up are documented and a second visit is made to ensure corrective actions were taken.

While the district is using this best practice, it could improve its efforts in three ways. First, routine assessment of the whole food service program is needed to identify district-wide improvements that can affect revenue and costs and would allow decision-makers to adjust or correct program activities to ensure that long-range program goals are met. District management monitors profit and loss statements regularly, but has not established district-wide program level benchmarks based on strategic district goals. For example, benchmarks for meal participation tied to long-range revenue goals are not included in a district strategic plan. As a result, progress towards goals and future budgetary needs cannot be assessed. Management needs to determine if problems and accomplishments are occurring at individual schools and district-wide. Implementing a comprehensive accountability system, as discussed in best practice 7 of this chapter will provided the information needed to address this issue.

Second, the district's efforts to ensure compliance with USDA requirements should be enhanced. For example, during the January 2002 USDA Commodity Distribution Program Audit, over 40 findings were reported, including outdated foods, inventory procedures not consistently followed, lack of verification for commodity food usage because commodities were not consistently differentiated from purchased foods on production records, inaccurate and incomplete usage and inventory records, funds collected from head start program for commodities distributed were not collected and deposited into the school food service account, lack of regularly scheduled pest control, overstocked inventory, and lack of storage space. Although the district satisfactorily addressed all the findings, additional checks on compliance should be implemented to make sure procedures are followed.

> **We recommend that the district perform additional training for staff completing site visit inspections to ensure violations are identified and corrected and require these staff to complete some unannounced visits to monitor compliance with federal, state, district policies, and program procedures.**

Third, the district has developed a maintenance schedule for kitchen equipment according to manufacturer guidelines. However, the food service program lacks a long-range equipment replacement plan to assist cash flow budgeting.

> **We recommend that the district develop a long-range equipment replacement plan for the food services program and tie this plan to the food services program budget.**

Best Practice 9: Using

District and program administrators effectively manage costs of the food service program through limited use of internal performance measures, benchmarks, and budgets on a regular basis to evaluate performance and use the analysis for action or change.

School district and program administrators should be making informed management decisions based on a goal driven, performance measurement system that is linked to the district's overall mission and strategic plan. Best practice 7 addresses the design, development, and maintenance of a comprehensive set of performance measures and benchmarks that comprise an accurate, complete, and reliable system of reporting for management to use. This best practice addresses management's use of the performance

measurement system through the routine collection, analysis and reporting of performance information. All districts should keep upper management informed with some form of performance reporting and analysis of operations.

The Alachua County School District's food service program routinely uses the following reports to monitor the operations: monthly and daily reports reported by each meal reimbursement category, daily bank deposits by school, meal status summary reports by school, budget summaries report, profit and loss reports, production reports for each school, participation reports, labor allocation reports, inventory utilization reports, and meal eligibility status reports. The food service program also periodically reports program performance to district management, such as its strategic planning update report. This report provides an update on the food service program's progress toward the Alachua County's School District Strategies (action plan), as mentioned at Exhibit 10-5 of this chapter. However, performance reporting should be expanded to include additional key performance measures, as described in best practice 7 of this chapter.

Best Practice 10: Using

The food service program and district comply with federal, state, and district policy.

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 Alachua County School District food service program passed both Department of Education Schools Meals Initiative (SMI) review and the Coordinated Review Effort (CRE) examination. Although the program did not initially pass the USDA Donated Foods inspection, it satisfactorily addressed the recommendations cited in the review.

Although the district is using this best practice, it could enhance its effectiveness by ensuring that all schools comply with vending machine policies. While district food service program compliance efforts generally support federal and state rules, vending machines located outside the cafeterias may operate contrary to school board policy. School board policy does not permit carbonated beverages to be sold where students are served or eating meals. We noted during our visit to two high schools that carbonated beverages without 100% fruit juice were sold near the cafeteria. Although the food service program has an announced inspection system to verify compliance with policies and procedures, it should also monitor key operations on an unscheduled basis.

> **We recommend that the food service program conduct unannounced visits to verify compliance with vending machine policy.**

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.

Like most businesses, to be successful, school district food service programs must be responsive to customers, particularly that of students, teachers, and other employees. Therefore, food service programs should solicit feedback actively and use it to identify needed improvements, eliminate barriers to student meal participation, and gauge reactions to changes in program operations, promotional campaigns, and service levels. The district can use a variety of mechanisms to obtain this information such as individual cafeteria evaluations, regular customer surveys, suggestion boxes, customer taste tests, and website access.

The Alachua County School District food service program continually seeks to identify and eliminate barriers to student participation. The district has developed an ongoing meal participation campaign to increase district participation rates. Efforts to promote meal participation include monthly themes, contests, give-always, decorative cafeterias to support themes, student surveys, student-friendly food court designs, outside serving windows, food carts, patio dining with additional serving stations, and grab-and-go food items.

The food service program has made an effort to solicit customer feedback by installing suggestion boxes at selected school sites. Suggestion boxes are placed in an accessible cafeteria location and remain in that location each school day to accept suggestions from student, staff, and parents. Also, surveys are given to stakeholders to solicit ideas about food choices.

Additionally, the district prepares participations report, which compiles data on breakfast, lunch, free, reduced and a la carte meal purchases compared to student enrollment and is reviewed quarterly. The district uses this information to determine the outcome of its efforts to increase participation.

11 Cost Control Systems

Summary

The Alachua County School District is using 18 of the 22 best practices in cost control systems. The district effectively manages cash, capital assets, debts, risks, inventory and purchasing. In addition, the district obtains and uses financial information through its data systems and from external audits, has established internal control procedures, ties its budget to the strategic plan, and has up-to-date fiscal policies and procedures. To use all the best practice standards and enhance the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its cost controls systems, the district needs to cross-train individuals in all the accounting functions, establish a written policy and procedure for the reporting of suspected improprieties, and provide and maintain an adequate fund balance guided by the district's strategic plan and budgeting process.

Background

The Alachua County School District's cost control activities are primarily managed by the finance function. Operational departments of the finance function include general accounting, accounts payable, and payroll.

Finance and accounting functions are centralized; however, input of time and attendance information for payroll processing and purchase requisitioning is decentralized. The district also has a centralized warehouse for school and food service inventories, under the responsibility of the purchasing and food services functions, respectively. The chief financial officer (CFO) has worked for the district for approximately three and one-half years and reports to the deputy superintendent for planning, budgeting, and systems accountability. Two chief accountants and one senior accountant support the CFO.

Exhibit 11-1 illustrates the organizational structure of the finance function within the Alachua County School District as of July 2003, with all personnel reporting to the CFO. As of June 2003, the district's organizational structure, including the finance function, was reviewed and modified by the board. Effective July 2003, the positions of chief accountant of payroll, the senior accountant of payroll, and the benefits coordinator positions were eliminated and their job responsibilities were redistributed among other personnel employees and a new payroll manager position. Additionally, many of the functions currently performed in payroll (primarily benefits), are moving under the Personnel Department in the new organizational structure.

Exhibit 11-1
Organizational Structure of the Financial Function as of July 2003
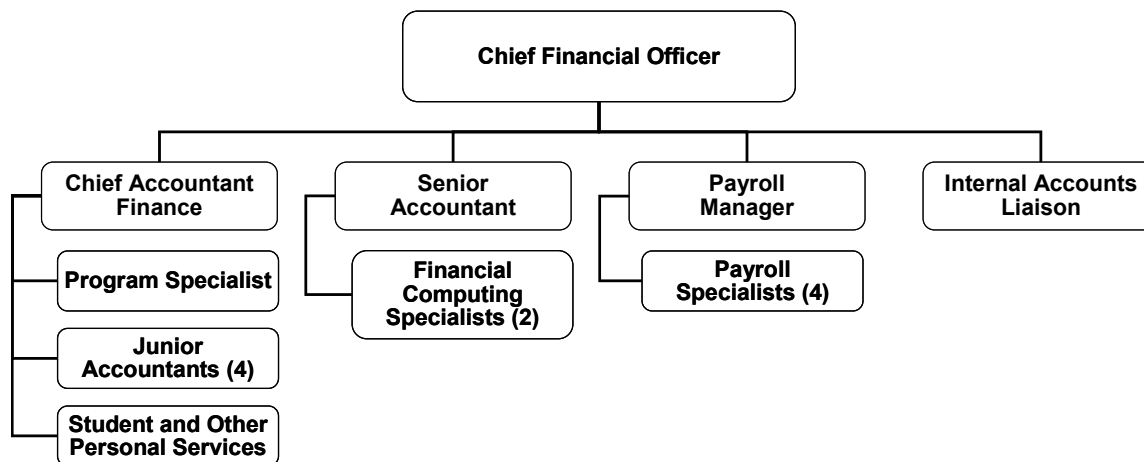
Source: Alachua County School District, July 2003.

The district uses governmental accounting to report its financial position and results of operations. Governmental accounting segregates an 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, other federal programs funds, capital improvement funds, capital projects funds, and other governmental funds. Substantially all of the district's resources are accounted for in governmental funds. Exhibit 11-2 shows that the district reported revenues of approximately $214 million in its governmental funds during the 2001-02 fiscal year.

Exhibit 11-2
Governmental Fund Revenues, 2001-02 Fiscal Year

General Fund	Special Revenue Funds	Capital Projects Funds	Debt Service Funds	Total
$151,194,366	$30,180,406	$19,385,105	$13,164,409	$213,924,286

Source: Audited Financial Statements for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2002.

Certain governmental funds account for non-operating activities of the district. For example, debt service funds and the 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
$928,693	$103,244,533	$47,021,140	$151,194,366

Source: Audited Financial Statements for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2002.

Generally federal program funds are restricted by federal grantors, so districts can only use those funds for educational activities that meet the specific purposes of the granting agency. Most federal grant

programs require revenue to be earned after appropriate expenditures are incurred. As a result, grant resources generally equal the amount of grant expenditures.

The state provided over 68% of the district's general fund resources during the 2001-02 fiscal year. Four fund sources, administered by the Florida Department of Education, comprise the majority of state revenue included in the district's general fund. The first source is the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP), designed to provide a base level of educational resources for all school districts. The second source consists of resources provided for categorical education programs, which include funds earmarked for specific programs such as supplemental academic instruction, instructional materials, and transportation. Third is lottery funds earmarked for educational enhancement and school advisory council activities. Fourth is workforce development funds used for adult and other vocational education services.

Local revenues are primarily generated from ad valorem (property) taxes and represent 31% of the district's general fund resources. The local resources are directed toward either the district's general fund, debt service fund, or for capital projects. Exhibit 11-4 shows the local taxes levied for education for the 2001-02 fiscal year.

Exhibit 11-4
Ad Valorem (Property) Taxes Levied for District Purposes, 2001-02 Fiscal Year

General Fund:		
Required local effort	5.806	$36,776,359
Basic discretionary local effort	0.510	3,230,441
Supplemental discretionary local effort	0.225	1,425,195
Debt Service Funds:		
General Obligation School Bonds:		
Series 1986, Refunding	0.600	3,800,519
Series 1993/2001, Refunding	0.525	3,325,454
Series 1992, Refunding	0.770	4,877,333
Capital Projects Funds:		
Local capital improvements	2.000	$12,668,398
Total	**10.436**	**$66,103,699**

Source: Audited Financial Statements for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2002.

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 67.9% of the 2001-02 fiscal year expenditures. Current expenditures are broken down into three major functional classifications; instruction, instructional support services, and general support services. Exhibit 11-5 shows general fund current expenditures on a functional basis.

Exhibit 11-5
General Fund Current Expenditures by Function, 2001-02 Fiscal Year

Instruction	Instructional Support Services	General Support Services	Total
$87,140,358	$22,077,831	$46,890,564	$156,108,753

Source: Audited Financial Statements for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2002.

The general fund expenditures are higher than the district's revenues for the 2001-02 fiscal year (Exhibits 11-3 and 11-5). Expenditures in excess of revenues have had a detrimental impact on unreserved general fund balance and this is discussed in greater detail later in this section.

Instruction and instructional support expenditures represented 70% of total general fund current 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 30% of total general fund current expenditures for the 2001-02 fiscal year. General support services include expenditures related to the functional categories of board activities, general administration (superintendent's office), school administration (school principals' offices), 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.). 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.

Exhibit 11- 6 shows the district's current general fund expenditures by natural classification (object) for the 2001-02 fiscal year. This schedule shows the expenditures in Exhibit 11-5 by type of expenditure in broad categories.

Exhibit 11-6
General Fund Current Expenditures by Natural Classification, 2001-02 Fiscal Year

Salaries	Employee Benefits	Purchased Services	Energy Services	Materials and Supplies	Capital Outlay	Other Expenses	Total
$103,157,286	$24,356,851	$14,175,931	$ 5,021,163	$ 4,834,698	$ 1,479,237	$ 3,083,587	$ 156,108,753

Source: Audited Financial Statements and Superintendent's Annual Financial Report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2002.

As primarily a service organization, the major expenditure objects for the school district are salaries and employee benefits, which comprised 80.9% of total general fund 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 school districts includes reserved and unreserved portions. Fund balances are often reserved for legal and other commitments of the entity. Common examples of reserves in Florida school districts include amounts reserved for outstanding purchase orders and contracts (encumbrances) and amounts reserved for restricted purposes (categorical programs). As a result, only the unreserved portion of the fund balance is actually available to offset unexpected needs and this portion is often referred to as the "rainy day" fund. For the purposes of our analysis, we compared the district's ratio of general fund unreserved fund balance with operating revenues to peer districts (Bay, Collier, Marion, Lake, and St. Lucie) and with the statewide average.

Exhibit 11-7 compares the district's financial position with its peers and statewide averages for the three-year period ending June 30, 2002. As can be seen in Exhibit 11-7, the district's ratio of unreserved fund balance to expenditures is consistently lower than the statewide average.

However, as noted in Management Structures Best Practice 7 the district anticipates the fund balance to be approximately $1.5 million for the 2003-04 school year. The district could strengthen its commitment to fiscal soundness by amending its strategic plan to include a provision to maintain an unreserved fund balance between 3-5% of operating expenditures. Action Plan 11-3 shows the steps necessary to implement this recommendation. Such actions will ensure that in the future an adequate fund balance is maintained and that expenditures are kept within available resources.

Exhibit 11-7
The District's Unreserved Fund Balance
is Lower than the Statewide and Peer Average
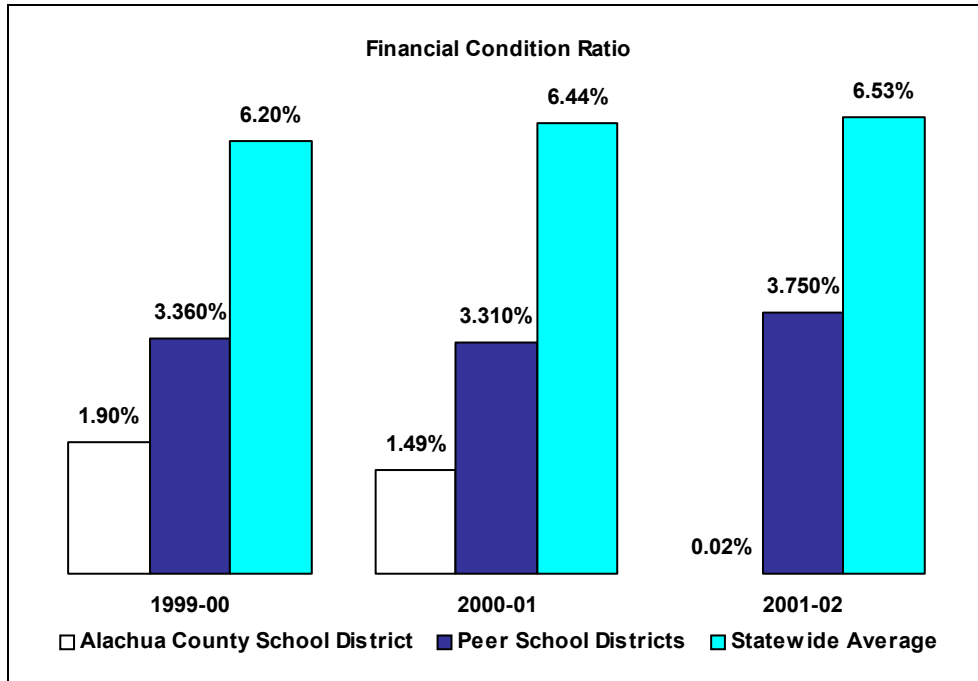
Source: Audited Financial Statements for the fiscal years ended June 30, 2000, 2001, and 2002.

Activities of particular interest

The district is exploring options to outsource a portion of the general stores inventory with an office supply vendor, which would provide direct delivery of supplies to schools and departments similar to a just-in-time program and reduce operating expenses. The program, implemented by several school districts, allows the end users to order items directly from the vendors, who deliver the items directly to the school or department instead of the district stocking these items in the warehouse and processing requisitions from the schools and departments. In conjunction with the inventory outsourcing, the district is exploring the use of purchase cards for the program.

Conclusions and Recommendations ───────

Summary of Conclusions for Cost Controls Systems Best Practices

Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
Financial Management	1. The district periodically analyzes the structure and staffing of its financial services organization.	No	11-8
	2. Management has developed and distributed written procedures for critical accounting processes and promotes ethical financial management practices.	No	11-9
	3. The district has adequate financial information systems that provide useful, timely, and accurate information.	Yes	11-10
	4. District financial staff analyzes significant expenditure processes to ensure that they are appropriately controlled.	Yes	11-11
Internal Controls	5. The district has established adequate internal controls.	Yes	11-11
	6. Management proactively responds to identified internal control weaknesses and takes immediate steps to correct the weaknesses.	Yes	11-12
	7. The district produces an annual budget that is tied to the strategic plan and provides useful and understandable information to users.	Yes	11-13
	8. Management analyzes strategic plans for measurable objectives or measurable results.	No	11-13
External and Internal Auditing	9. The district ensures that it receives an annual external audit and uses the audit to improve its operations.	Yes	11-14
	10. The district has an effective internal audit function and uses the audits to improve its operations.	No	11-14
	11. The district ensures that audits of internal funds and discretely presented component units (foundations and charter schools) are performed timely.	Yes	11-15
Cash Management	12. The district periodically reviews cash management activities, banking relationships, and investment performance, and considers alternatives.	Yes	11-16
Capital Asset Management	13. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective management of capital assets.	Yes	11-17
	14. The district insures that significant capital outlay purchases meet strategic plan objectives.	Yes	11-17
Debt Management	15. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective debt management.	Yes	11-18
	16. The district ensures that significant debt financings meet strategic plan objectives.	Yes	11-18
Risk Management	17. The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective risk management.	Yes	11-19
	18. District staff periodically monitors the district's compliance with various laws and regulations related to risk management.	Yes	11-19
	19. The district prepares appropriate written cost and benefit analyses for insurance coverage.	Yes	11-20
Purchasing	20. The district has established written policies and procedures to take maximum advantage of competitive bidding, volume discounts, and special pricing agreements.	Yes	11-20

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Practice Area	Best Practice	Using the Best Practice?	Page No.
Inventory Management	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	Yes	11-21

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Best Practice 1: Not Using

While the district periodically analyzes the structure and staffing of its financial services organization the district needs to cross-train all accounting functions.

In recent years, a variety of external factors have directly and indirectly impacted school district financial services functions. Some school districts have experienced significant changes in student population size—mostly getting larger, but some getting smaller. Similarly, changes in existing laws and new laws have changed financial documentation and reporting requirements and have impacted workload requirements. Because of this, districts should regularly evaluate the financial 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 Alachua County School District has an approved organizational structure in the financial services area. The organizational structure of the financial services area was updated within the last 18 months, and the area is divided into the functional departments of accounting, accounts payable, and payroll. The position descriptions for critical financial service positions contain appropriate educational and experience requirements. Financial services personnel receive adequate training through district computer classes on the use of the accounting software and spreadsheet and word processing packages. Senior personnel can attend seminars provided by an external certified public accountant and at least one individual will attend seminars of general interest provided by external vendors.

The financial services area is adequately staffed and effectively delivers financial services. Adequate training is provided to the decentralized accounting services staff. Annual training is also provided to all school bookkeepers and accounting staff.

The district has reviewed the potential cost savings of privatizing some accounting functions. While the district has not privatized accounting functions as of May 2003, outsourcing of the internal accounts audit is expected to be implemented for the 2003-04 fiscal year.

The district can improve its operations and fully utilize this best practice by addressing one major issue. Although the district offers cross-training in the accounts payable area, it has not implemented cross-training for all accounting functions. One example of this is the bank reconciliation function. Currently, the chief financial officer (CFO) completes the bank reconciliations if the staff person assigned is unable to do so. A timely reconciliation of bank accounts is critical for the district to be able to effectively manage its cash flows. An effective cross-training program would ensure that accounting functions are completed in a timely manner and are not left to individuals whose efforts are needed in other critical areas.

Action Plan 11-1

We recommend that the district cross-train all accounting functions, with cross-trained individuals periodically performing these alternate accounting functions to ensure continued competence.		
Action Needed	Step 1:	Review the qualifications of staff currently assigned to the accounting area. The chief accountant, senior accountant, and program specialist should have the general knowledge necessary to perform most accounting functions. Other individuals could be cross-trained to perform other accounting functions based upon their aptitude and general knowledge.
	Step 2:	On a monthly basis, cross-train at least two accounting functions, until all functions are covered. The selected individuals should work closely with the individual performing the task for a period necessary to learn the intricacies of the new function while also completing normally assigned duties.
	Step 3:	The cross-trained individuals should perform the new function independently for a period of time.
	Step 4:	This individual should subsequently perform the new accounting function at least semi-annually.
Who is responsible	Chief Financial Officer	
Time Frame	March 2004	

Best Practice 2: Not Using

While management has developed and distributed written procedures for critical accounting processes and promotes ethical financial management practices, it has not developed a procedure for employees to confidentially report a suspected impropriety.

It is critical that districts be able to continue day-to-day financial operations. Even small school districts must have numerous control processes and safeguards to ensure that district resources are adequately protected and used. These control processes should be documented to ensure consistency in their application. Written procedures frequently represent the best way to document these processes.

Every school district has board policies that generally include 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 document the intent of those policies;

- protect the institutional knowledge of an organization, so that as experienced employees leave, new employees can benefit from the experience of prior employees;

- provide the basis for training new employees; and

- offer a tool for evaluating employee performance based on 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, school districts benefit from having strong ethics standards (policies) for district accounting and financial staff and from processes that encourage reporting of suspected improprieties. When employees understand the importance of ethical conduct of their responsibilities and the ramifications of unethical conduct, the overall control environment is enhanced. Also, processes that encourage reporting of suspected improprieties without fear of reprisal further strengthen the control environment.

The Alachua County School District's principal accounting records are broadly outlined in the policy manual. In addition, each individual in the financial services area has a procedures manual for his or her

specific job function. A complete procedures manual for all job functions is kept in the financial services area.

Only four individuals in the accounting area have the authority to prepare and/or review journal entries. All journal entries are approved prior to entry into the general ledger. The district has established a cutoff period for accounting transactions and effectively communicated that cutoff period to the accounting staff.

The board has approved an ethics policy for district personnel. This policy is contained in the district's policy manual. The Alachua County School District also participates in the Campus Crime Stoppers Program, which encourages calls to report suspected crimes, and recently adopted a crisis and emergency plan summary sheet. Although these programs generally address crime prevention and intervention and emergency responses on school campuses, they also clearly outline the procedures that should be followed and the agencies to contact if it is not possible to contact the district office.

However, the district is not fully using this best practice because it has not included a written policy to support confidential reporting of suspected improprieties. Although all employees that we interviewed were comfortable with reporting a suspected impropriety to at least the CFO, this comfort level was based upon familiarity and trust of the individual and not a written policy. In addition, the district's recently completed employee manual did not contain any written procedures for reporting a suspected impropriety.

Action Plan 11-2

We recommend that the district adopt a written procedure for reporting suspected improprieties and amend its recently completed employee manual to include this procedure.		
Action Needed	Step 1:	Utilize the current verbally communicated procedure for reporting suspected improprieties as the basis for developing a written policy.
	Step 2:	Communicate this policy by amending the current employee manual to include written procedures supporting the policy.
Who is responsible	Deputy superintendent for planning, budgeting and systems accountability, chief financial officer and personnel.	
Time Frame	September 2004	

Best Practice 3: Using

The district has financial information systems that provide useful, timely, and accurate information.

Florida school districts are subject to significant federal, state, and local (board) oversight of their financial activities. Also, given the limited financial resources provided to school districts, it is important that they have adequate financial information systems that provide useful, timely, and accurate information. Users of this information must be able to understand the information provided so that they can make informed spending and resource use decisions.

The Alachua County School District has decentralized its timesheet reporting and requisitioning functions. The district has established procedures specific to cutoff periods and necessary authorizations for payments. The use of passwords and user IDs restricts entry to the online requisitioning system to authorized personnel. The accounting software currently used for most of the major accounting functions minimizes manual processes. District staff analyzes financial and reporting procedures and recently changed procedures in its accounts payable area to increase efficiency and provide effective cross-training. The district's strategic plan is closely tied to its budget and contains measurable objectives and results. The accounting system conforms to *Financial and Program Cost Accounting and Reporting for Florida Schools 2001* standards. Management provides board members with a clear and concise monthly report effectively summarizing financial operations. Also, the district's accounting system provides financial information online to board members and department managers on funding sources, budget limitations, and financial conditions.

Although the district is using this best practice, it could improve the efficiency of its accounting operations by using the same accounting software for all accounting functions. The district currently uses one accounting software package for most accounting functions, but not its payroll function. The payroll function uses a different accounting software package, which communicates with the main accounting software. Because the two programs are not fully integrated, additional effort is utilized to allow the two programs to communicate. The district has indicated that delay in the implementation of one software package for all accounting functions was due to insufficient staffing resources in the technology section. Additional personnel were added in this area in the fall of 2002; therefore, the district should either implement the integrated payroll system, or evaluate the different software options available and determine if it is in the district's best interest to utilize a different integrated system. As of June 2003, the district has decided to reconsider its payroll system process and may purchase an entirely different payroll system.

> **We recommend that the district's executive team continue to monitor the process by which the new payroll system will be selected to ensure that it is the most cost-effective, meets the needs of all accounting functions, and eliminates duplication of efforts.**

Best Practice 4: Using

District financial staff analyzes significant expenditure processes to ensure that they are appropriately controlled.

Other than salaries, the expenses of many school districts are frequently concentrated among a few vendors who are paid for goods and/or services on a repetitive basis. Examples include employee benefits, utility payments, payments for frequently used supplies, progress payments on contracts, and periodic payments for the use of assets, such as lease payments. It is important that employees approving such bills for payment are knowledgeable about the 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 Alachua County School District's Purchasing Department analyzes both financial and quality control methods in relation to expenditures by carefully tracking all bids and evaluating both the bid amounts and the vendors who submitted the bids. All functions of the financial services area coordinate their efforts and keep a record of open bids and vendors who have prepared bids posted in the business services area. The recent reorganization of the accounts payable area has increased accounting personnel's knowledge of individual vendors. Each of the four junior accountants is responsible for a set group of vendors. These individuals also investigate any unusual fluctuations in invoices from these vendors.

INTERNAL CONTROLS

Best Practice 5: Using

The district has established adequate internal controls.

School districts must practice sound financial management in order to maximize the effectiveness of limited resources and to plan for future needs. Effective financial management ensures that internal controls are in place and operating as intended.

The Alachua County School District has established effective controls over its cash receipting process by effectively using its accounting personnel. The mail employee receives and logs all cash receipts from incoming mail and gives the checks to a financial computing specialist to prepare a deposit ticket. Deposits are usually made daily. The log of cash receipts is given to a program specialist for coding and journal entry preparation. Another individual is responsible for preparing the bank reconciliations.

The district has also established effective controls over its payroll processes to ensure compliance with all federal, state, and district policies. Payroll tax and health insurance payments are remitted timely. The district maintains perpetual records of sick and vacation leave balances. The senior accountant in the business services area is responsible for ensuring that payroll costs are properly coded in the accounting records.

Although the district is generally using this best practice, there are two related areas where the district can enhance its operations to improve the timeliness of its purchasing and payment processes. In the current system, purchase information is shared using a four-part purchase order paper trail. One part of the purchase order is sent to the vendor, one part to the school or department, one part to the Finance Department, and the final part is maintained in the Purchasing Department. Using an automated purchase order printing system would streamline this process and increase efficiency.

In addition, while the district has established effective controls over its disbursement processes, the system is inefficient. Currently, the district's accounting software prevents an invoice payment unless sufficient funds are available. When an invoice is received from a vendor, the accounting staff checks all the appropriate coding and then forwards a copy of the invoice to the school or department, since the district will not pay an invoice until the required evidence of receipt of goods is received. The school or department signs the invoice and returns it to the financial services area for payment. Invoices are properly stamped paid when payment is made. There is an inherent delay in mailing a paper invoice to a school or department, and a small percentage holds the invoice thereby delaying payment to vendors. The disbursement process could be enhanced, while still maintaining good financial controls, by electronically scanning invoices and transmitting them via e-mail to schools or departments.

District personnel indicated that the district possesses the equipment necessary to implement the electronic purchase order and to electronically scan invoices for submission to the school or department via the e-mail system.

> **We recommend that the district automate the purchase order process by implementing the financial system's on-line purchase order form and electronic signature feature to reduce the time and resources spent on these clerical functions. In addition, the district should scan invoices and electronically transmit them to a school or department; with the school or department e-mailing the Accounting Department an acknowledgement of receipt of goods or services and authorizing payment.**

Best Practice 6: Using

Management proactively responds to identified internal control weaknesses and takes immediate steps to correct the weaknesses.

As noted previously, school districts must practice sound financial management in order to maximize the effectiveness of limited resources and to plan for future needs. Effective financial management ensures that internal controls are in place and operating as intended. School districts demonstrate effective financial management when they proactively respond to internal control weaknesses identified in external audits and other monitoring reviews.

We reviewed the Alachua County School District's efforts to resolve internal control weaknesses identified in the external financial audits and other monitoring reviews made over the past three years. Our review disclosed that district staff responded promptly to the findings in the reports and corrected them in a timely manner. In addition, review teams monitor the charter schools and assist them in resolving internal control weaknesses. Also, the internal accounts auditor resolves special issues for the district's departments.

Best Practice 7: Using

The district produces an annual budget that is tied to the strategic plan and provides useful and understandable information to users.

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;
- obtaining school board input on goals and major priorities;
- developing objectives for strategic plan goals that include measurable outcomes and achievement dates as appropriate;
- assigning responsibility for achieving objectives;
- annually monitoring performance and adjusting objectives as necessary to ensure achievement of strategic plan goals; and
- requiring budget expenditures be tied directly to the strategic plan priorities of the district.

The Alachua County School District's strategic plan is linked to its budget. The district's budget meets the state-mandated and district-required time deadlines. All of the budget document summaries are in an approved format and the appropriate detail is included in these summaries. The district's board minutes indicate that all budget amendments have been presented to the board.

When developing its budget, the district uses prior year comparisons and enrollment projections to estimate budget sources. The district follows the Truth in Millage (TRIM) schedule as outlined in Florida School Law and evidenced by the TRIM calendar, which conforms to this schedule. The district also conducts a budgetary workshop, which is properly advertised to all interested district stakeholders.

The development of the budget is linked to the strategic plan. District policy requires that school principals include School Advisory Council (SAC) and community input when developing school budgets. The input of the SAC is also evidenced in the minutes of the board.

Best Practice 8: Not Using

The district strategic plan does not incorporate a provision for the maintenance of an adequate unreserved fund balance.

As mentioned previously, districts that make the best use of their resources and achieve high student performance rates generally practice some form of strategic planning that looks at all district operations, links support functions to the achievement of institutional goals, and has a direct link to the annual planning and budgeting process.

The Alachua County School District's strategic plan objectives are linked to specific departments or schools. Each school or department reports its progress toward achieving its objectives, and all expenditures are tied to the strategic plan objectives. Each department is responsible for its own budget, including amendments, although the financial services staff will occasionally propose a departmental budget amendment if necessary. Also, all budget amendments are presented to the board and included in the board minutes.

However, the board can improve its operations and fully utilize this best practice by providing for the maintenance of an adequate unreserved fund balance in its strategic plan, and tying the strategic plan to the budget process. Board policy does require, if feasible, a fund balance reserve, in the operating fund budget, which is at least 4% of the recurring expenditure budget. The district's unreserved fund balance,

at less than 0.1% of its operating budget for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2002, is extremely low. The district's strategic plan should be amended to tie the strategic plan to the budget process to ensure the maintenance of an adequate unreserved fund balance.

Action Plan 11-3

We recommend that the district's strategic plan be amended to tie the strategic plan to the budget process, and to incorporate a provision for the maintenance of an adequate unreserved fund balance.		
Action Needed	Step 1:	Determine a prudent unreserved fund balance ratio based on expenditures. We believe a ratio from 3-5% of operating expenditures would be sufficient.
	Step 2:	Establish a long-term objective to maintain the recommended unreserved fund balance by a particular future fiscal year.
	Step 3:	Determine the level of unreserved fund balance the district will attempt to achieve in each of the next fiscal years, based on other funding and expenditure options.
	Step 4:	Incorporate the determined level of unreserved fund balance as an objective in the next update to the district's strategic plan.
	Step 5:	Redefine this objective annually and incorporate in each strategic plan update.
Who is responsible	School board, deputy superintendent for Planning, Budgeting, and Systems Accountability, and chief financial officer	
Time Frame	September 2004	

Note: This action plan should be implemented in conjunction with the recommendation in Management Structures, Best Practice 9.

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL AUDITING

Best Practice 9: Using

The district ensures that it receives an annual external audit and uses the audit to improve its operations.

Section 11.45(2)(d), and 218.39(d) *Florida Statutes*, requires 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. This section also provides that financial audits must be conducted in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards and government auditing standards as adopted by the Board of Accountancy.

The Alachua County School District has complied with law which requires that the district have an annual audit conducted by either the Auditor General or an independent accounting firm. A review of the audit reports for the years ended June 30, 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002, indicate that the external audits were conducted in accordance with government auditing standards. Further, the district responded in a timely and appropriate manner to findings included in these audit reports. Management's comments and corrective action plans were included in the audit report for June 30, 2002, and none of the reports contained repeat findings.

Best Practice 10: Not Using

The district does not have an internal audit function, although it has 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.

The Alachua County School District does not have an internal audit function as anticipated by this best practice. The district had an internal auditor who performed the internal accounts audits and annual risk assessments for the schools, but the district has decided to outsource the internal accounts audits to a certified public accounting firm, and eliminate the internal accounts function, effective July 1, 2003. As with many school districts, the district believes that it cannot afford the cost of maintaining 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 and tangible personal property 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 continue to conduct financial risk assessments of its operations and activities annually. A review of the risk assessments submitted by the district indicates that departmental risk assessments were commenced in conjunction with this review.

Action Plan 11-4

We recommend that the district continue to conduct annual risk assessments.		
Action Needed	Step 1:	Continue to conduct annual risk assessments using district staff.
	Step 2:	Review the results of the risk assessment, prioritize high-risk activities, and assign responsibility for addressing and resolving prioritized risks.
Who Is Responsible	Deputy superintendent for Planning, Budgeting and Systems Accountability	
Time Frame	August 2004	

Best Practice 11: Using

The district ensures that audits of internal funds and discretely presented component units (foundations and charter schools) are performed timely.

The financial transactions of individual school activities and organizations are accounted for in the school internal accounts (funds). 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 activities generally should be included with that of the district. However, this 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. School districts frequently monitor these related organizations' activity by reviewing the annual audit reports. Accordingly, it is important that the school districts receive timely audits of these related organizations and perform appropriate review of the reports.

The Alachua County School District has received all nine audits of its charter schools and the direct support foundation for the year ended June 30, 2002. The school internal accounts audits for the 2000-01 school year were presented to the board on June 18, 2002.

Material findings in a charter school audit are directed to a monitoring review committee. The internal accounts auditor follows up on any findings in the audits of the school internal audits or special review audits.

CASH MANAGEMENT

Best Practice 12: Using

The district periodically reviews cash management activities, banking relationships, and 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 Alachua County School District maintains its cash deposits at a qualified public depository. The board has policies and procedures governing the handling and depositing of cash receipts. Bank reconciliations are performed by the financial computing specialist while the program computing specialist prepares the journal entry. The financial computing specialist ensures that any needed adjustments are made. Most of the bank reconciliations are reviewed by the chief accountant who would also direct the investigation of any unusual reconciling items. The chief financial officer will investigate issues and problems in the reconciliation of the general fund bank account, and as stated in Best Practice 1 of this chapter, will reconcile this account if the assigned staff member is unable to do so.

Sufficient personnel are employed in the Accounting and Finance Departments to ensure adequate segregation of duties for the cash receipts and disbursement functions. Additionally, the recording of cash receipts is functionally separate from the responsibility for general ledger entries and to reconcile the bank accounts. An employee within the Accounting Department, with no cash handling responsibilities, performs the reconciliation process for the district's bank accounts.

The most recent cash advance forecast supplied (July-September 2002) ensured adequate liquidity throughout the period. The district is in the process of evaluating its banking agreements and has requested proposals from some of the larger banks in the district.

The district invests approximately 90-95% with the State Board of Administration for participation in the Local Government Surplus Fund investment pool created by s. 218.405, *Florida Statutes*. The remaining investments of the district are for the early retirement program. The district's policy for these investments mandates the preservation of purchasing power. It limits the amount of any type of investment and requires that all of the investment vehicles be readily marketable. The district has complied with the requirements of Florida statutes regarding the investment of public funds. All investments are reported at fair market value.

CAPITAL ASSET MANAGEMENT

Best Practice 13: Using

The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective management of capital assets.

Capital assets include all properties, vehicles, equipment, and building contents. School districts should keep and maintain accurate accounting records because:

- accurate capital asset records provide the basis for adequate insurance coverage;

- annual physical inventories of capital assets allow the district to survey the physical condition of its assets and assess the need for repair, maintenance, or replacement;

- reliable information about currently owned capital assets provides assistance when determining future needs and provides a basis for budgeting capital asset needs; and

- accurate capital asset records provide users with documentation of how taxes have been used to carry out the operations of the district.

The Alachua County School District's policy relating to capital asset acquisitions is in accordance with law and Ch. 10.400, *Rules of the Auditor General*. The district has established a threshold of $750 for capitalization of assets. All capital assets are tagged when received in the inventory warehouse. The district annually reconciles capital asset expenditures to the capital asset additions. Construction project values are accumulated in a work-in-process account and the value is transferred to an asset account at the project's completion.

The district maintains a detailed subsidiary record of capital assets that conforms to the rules of the Auditor General and annually reconciles the subsidiary records to the general ledger. All tangible property in the district is tagged with a decal. Real property is identified by a project number. The property officer at each school or department assigns an employee with non-custodial responsibility (usually the head custodian or bookkeeper) to annually inventory the capital assets at each school or department and report the results to the Physical Distribution (inventory warehouse) Department. The Physical Distribution Department will conduct an inventory of capital assets whenever there is a change of principal at a school or manager in a department. The district requires a written explanation for all unaccounted for property, and files reports with local law enforcement authorities on stolen property.

The district appropriately accounts for capital assets acquired with restricted source funds by including the funding source information in the property records.

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 resources and consistently have high student performance generally practice some form of strategic planning that addresses district operations, including the capital acquisition program, and links operational functions to the achievement of institutional goals.

The Alachua County School District maintains each capital project under a separate project and object number. Monthly, the district files a copy of the Special Program Funds Report (OEF report 442) with the Department of Education and certifies that all funds have been spent properly. Significant capital outlay expenditures are based on a five-year capital outlay plan that is updated annually.

DEBT MANAGEMENT

Best Practice 15: Using

The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective debt management.

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.

In addition to property taxes for construction (the Capital Outlay Millage Levy) and state funding sources (primarily Public Education Capital Outlay funds) many school districts obtain financing for construction by issuing debt. The authority to issue debt is contained in the Florida Constitution and in Ch. 1010, *Florida Statutes*. Bonded debt issues by school districts have declined in recent years. For most long-term debt issues, school districts must ensure that a variety of accounting, reporting, and compliance requirements are met.

District personnel are knowledgeable about debt service financial reporting requirements and the district has established procedures to comply with the continuing financial disclosure rules of the Securities and Exchange Commission. An independent public accounting firm completes the annual federal arbitrage calculation for the district as provided in s. 148 (f) (2) of the Internal Revenue Code. The district has complied with all bond covenants and has filed the required financial disclosure information for the most recent year for which an external audit has been completed (fiscal year ended June 30, 2002).

Best Practice 16: Using

The district ensures that significant debt financings meet strategic plan objectives.

As mentioned previously, districts that make the best use of resources and achieve high student performance rates generally practice some form of strategic planning that covers all district operations, including the use of debt management to meet capital acquisition program goals, and links them to the achievement of institutional goals.

The Alachua County School District's debt level complies with applicable laws and is tied to expected revenues and projected school enrollment and are consistent with the strategic plan objectives which analyze such factors as demographics, community support for education, and local community growth plans.

The district demonstrates its determination to make sound financial decisions by using an independent consultant to assist in the evaluation of financial alternatives. A committee has been established to explore financing alternatives such as increasing the sales tax rate to receive the half-cent available for capital projects.

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 insure 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. [1]

The Alachua County School District has four policies concerning insurance and risk management. The district has also developed a comprehensive risk management safety program. Insurance issues are regularly addressed in presentations to the board.

The district has adequate insurance coverage and complies with applicable state laws and rules regarding both the types of insurance coverage and how they acquire insurance coverage. The district updates their insurance coverage as necessary to meet the changing needs of the district.

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.

The Alachua County School District's policies require clear and complete financial contract information. The board minutes indicate that considerable thought and consideration is given to insurance coverage in the district. The district participates in the Florida School Board Insurance Trust. This consortium of districts pools resources to obtain more favorable insurance rates than each would be able to obtain on its own. District staff analyzes its current insurance plans and regularly presents the results of these analyses to the board.

The committee for benefits as well as district staff reviews the results of the annual insurance survey of all school districts published by the Florida School Boards Association. The information published in the survey is used in negotiations with insurance companies and in making presentations to the board.

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[1] 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.

Best Practice 19: Using

The district prepares appropriate written cost and benefit analyses for insurance coverage.

As mentioned previously, managing risks has become a critical component of 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 costs with their peers and continually evaluate new risk management products to determine the cost benefit.

The Alachua County School District participates in the Florida School Board Insurance Trust, which annually selects a broker to shop for a package of insurance for the entire group. Dramatic increases in insurance premium rates have resulted in the issuance of requests for proposals to insurance companies. All insurance evaluations are presented to the board.

A selected board member serves as insurance trustee for the district. The trustee, as well as individuals from other districts, reviews the insurance presentations of various companies for property and casualty coverage and then votes on the program to be presented to the full board for action. The insurance trustee gives a public summary to the board and answers any questions that board members have.

The Risk Management Department compares the cost and benefits of the insurance coverage in the district with local industry, other governmental entities, and comparable school districts and then makes a recommendation to the board.

PURCHASING

Best Practice 20: Using

The district has established written policies and procedures to take maximum advantage of competitive bidding, volume discounts, and special pricing agreements.

An effective purchasing system allows a school district to provide quality materials, supplies, and equipment in the right quantity in a timely, cost-effective manner. A good purchasing system has established purchasing policies implemented through effective and well-developed procedures. Careful planning and cost-effective practices such as bulk-purchasing and price/bid solicitation provide the framework for the efficient procurement of goods and services. School districts must also ensure that goods and services are obtained to the specifications of the users; at the lowest possible costs; and in accordance with applicable state laws and regulations.

The Alachua County School District has commissioned a study of its purchasing and warehousing function by vendor and is investigating the benefits that might be obtained by outsourcing a portion of its warehouse inventory. The district is also aware of the benefits of a purchasing card system, and is investigating implementing a purchasing card system. The district requires three quotations for purchases between $12,499 and $24,999 and competitive bids on all purchases over $24,999. The district uses state purchasing contracts when beneficial or to benchmark costs when negotiating vendor contracts.

The Purchasing Department is both functionally and physically separate from the requisitioning activity, which is decentralized and performed at the department and school level. Schools and departments enter requisitions into the district's online accounting/finance system, which includes a "budget blocking" mechanism that prevents the creation of a contractual obligation for which sufficient funds have not been allocated or encumbered.

The district participates in a regional cooperative for diesel fuel, gasoline, and bus fuel. Also, the district piggybacks the purchase of some items on the bids of larger counties. The district achieves greater purchasing power by using these methods rather than accepting bids from vendors as an individual district.

INVENTORY MANAGEMENT

Best Practice 21: Using

The district has established written policies and procedures and periodically updates them to provide for effective management of inventories.

Many school districts have chosen to centralize their warehousing function. In many instances school 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 Alachua County School District has established effective controls over the inventory process. All purchase orders received in the inventory warehouse are requisitioned online, assigned to be filled, and then forwarded to the ordering department.

The warehouse is reasonably safeguarded. The physical distribution warehouse is staffed at all times during normal operating hours. All visitors must check in at the front office. When not in operation, access to warehouse grounds is restricted by a perimeter and building alarm that notifies the district's alarm monitoring company when activated. Inventory supplies susceptible to physical deterioration are stored in the warehouse freezer units, which contain monitoring alarms to alert personnel to changes in temperature. The warehouse staff conducts an annual inventory count of warehouse items.

Best Practice 22: Using

The district periodically evaluates the warehousing function to determine cost-effectiveness.

School districts that have centralized warehousing functions can use this best practice by evaluating the total cost of its warehousing operation and comparing this cost with alternative inventory procurement services. Recently, many organizations have been reassessing the need to maintain central warehousing facilities by assessing the potential economies of outsourcing warehouse operations to inventory supply companies. Some organizational studies have found that some inventory suppliers can provide services comparable to the central warehouse function at costs equal to or lower than the central warehouse function. The end result for these school districts has been to fully eliminate central warehouses and replace them with inventory supply delivery services for applicable and appropriate items.

The Alachua County School District is exploring inventory alternatives and has engaged an outside vendor to evaluate its current warehousing function. Factors considered by the outside vendor included, but were not limited to, timeliness of inventory orders, correctness of orders, and courteousness of the warehouse staff. In anticipation of outsourcing a significant portion of the district's warehouse inventory, the district used the outside vendor on a very limited scale to evaluate the vendor's efficiency and effectiveness.

Although the district uses this best practice, the vendor's study suggests the district could realize considerable annual cost savings by more fully implementing the purchasing alternative offered by the vendor. There are other issues related to the vendor's procurement alternative, such as internal controls and compatibility with the district's software. In order to maximize the savings, the district must use a purchasing card system, which it does not currently have, to avoid limiting the available catalog choices. Using purchasing cards requires good internal controls to prevent unauthorized use, or overspending the budget, and to ensure timely recording in the district's expenditure ledger.

> **We recommend that the district continue to investigate the costs, benefits, and internal control issues involved in outsourcing part of the district's inventory and implementing the purchasing card system.**

A Action Plan

Management Structures

Action Plan 2-1

We recommend that the district develop a comprehensive procedures manual.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Department heads should first develop and/or update operating manuals for their respective areas, cross-referencing the procedures to the originating board policy.
	Step 2.	Once department procedures are developed, a district-wide manual for procedures that cross department lines should be developed.
	Step 3.	District level procedures should be developed where appropriate, including a procedure share all board information requests with the superintendent as discussed in BP1 and the other procedures currently contained in memos, notices, and other less official documents.
	Step 4.	The district should facilitate public consultation of the administrative guidelines by establishing a direct link to the procedure manual through the home page of the website (Intranet) as with school board policies.
	Step 5.	The district should consider footnoting each policy stating where the procedures for that particular policy are located. As long as individuals can access procedures through the computer, updates can be made without having to distribute hard copies throughout the district.
Who Is Responsible	Superintendent, department heads.	
Time Frame	August 2004	

Performance Accountability Systems

Action Plan 3-1

We recommend that the district develop accountability measurement systems for all its educational and operational programs and use performance data to inform management of adequate progress and make informed policy decisions.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	The superintendent should assign the director of the Testing and Research Department to work with principals and educational and operational directors to develop performance measures, including outcome and efficiency measures for all programs. This process should be integrated with the district's planning processes.
	Step 2.	Operational executive directors and directors should identify input and outcome measures and indicators of efficiency and effectiveness. Focus should be on desired results and outcomes, not just activities. Each measure should be clearly defined, and staff must make sure that measures are adequate.
	Step 3.	Operational executive directors and directors should identify how performance measures link to the budget and the measures in the strategic plan.
	Step 4.	Program directors and supervisors review program-level performance measures with staff of each major program to ensure that the measures: • Meet district expectations and • Clearly and logically relate to those developed at various other district administrative levels such as those in school improvement plans and the strategic plan.
	Step 5.	For each performance measure, operational executive directors and directors should identify the data needed and provide the information below. • Who will collect performance data and how often? What is the source of the data (e.g., state or district reports)? • In what format is the data needed? • How often should the data be collected? • Who (program staff, department head, assistant superintendent, superintendent, school board) will the data are reported to and how often? • How should the data be used?
	Step 6.	For each performance measure, the operational executive directors and directors should identify benchmarks the district should adopt as standards or expectations for performance to be achieved within the next budget cycle.
	Step 7.	The proposed measures and standards should be presented to the superintendent and board for approval.
	Step 8.	The superintendent should direct all schools and divisions to collect data on the measures.
	Step 9.	Operational executive directors and directors should periodically evaluate the performance and cost-efficiency measures.
	Step 10.	Operational executive directors and directors should select a few critical performance and cost-efficiency measures that should be reported periodically to school board members, superintendent, parents, and taxpayers to demonstrate how well the program is performing. The district could use communication resources such as TV broadcasting, brochures, web page, and schools' bulletin boards.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Research and Evaluation with assistance and support from School Directors, Assistants, All major programs' Executive Directors, Program Directors, Director of the Division of Curriculum and Instructional Services.	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Action Plan 3-2

We recommend that the district use its accountability system and other mechanisms to identify programs or strategies in need of evaluation and conduct evaluations of these programs or strategies.

Action needed	Step 1.	The district should use the accountability system recommended in Action Plan 3-1 and other appropriate criteria to identify programs or activities in need of evaluation. Other criteria could include high-cost or high-risk activities or public discontent with a program or activity.
	Step 2.	Once it identifies the evaluation subject, the district should determine how to best conduct the evaluation. Options could include an in-house evaluation conducted by employees that are independent of the program/ activity being evaluated or a contracted study. Other districts have worked with university schools of education to assist them in such studies.
	Step 3.	The district should publish the evaluation report and present any recommendation(s) to the board for approval.
Who is responsible	Director of Research and Evaluation with the support of the Superintendent and Board to help recommend the programs or activities to be evaluated.	
Timeframe	December 2004	

Educational Service Delivery

Action Plan 4-1

We recommend that the district monitor placement data to ensure the timely evaluation and placement of ESE students.

Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop a district-wide system to track the different stages of the 60-day referral process. These stages should include time from completed referral to testing; from testing to report; from report to eligibility staffing, and from staffing to placement.
	Step 2.	Use the data to identify patterns or probable causes for students that are not identified and placed within 60 days.
	Step 3.	Use these findings to improve procedures by providing added support or amending procedures.
	Step 4.	Establish a consolidated report with date of completed referral to date of eligibility staffing.
	Step 5.	Track placement data quarterly, ensuring timely placement into programs.
Who Is Responsible	ESE director, student services director	
Time Frame	October 2003 to complete the review and establish new procedures; assessment of performance will be ongoing..	

Action Plan 4-2

We recommend that the district seek Medicaid reimbursement for all services provided, using reimbursements to offset increased clerical support.

Action Needed	Step 1.	In addition to services currently billed, begin to bill Medicaid for all eligible services not currently billed including Occupational Therapy, Speech-Language Services, and Behavioral Services.
	Step 2.	Add a clerical position to the department to mange increases in paperwork for the additional billing.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Exceptional Student Education (or designee)	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Action Plan 4-3

We recommend that the district evaluate the strategies in the Continuous Monitoring Plan.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Ensure the plan's goals are SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, reasonable, time-bounded),
	Step 2.	Track the number of ESE placements (by race and other indicators) and review data to ensure that the proportionality of ESE student is within the acceptable range and to identify which strategies have been effective in reducing disproportionality.
	Step 3.	Use data to assess Continuous Monitoring Plan goals and adjust goals and strategies as necessary.
	Step 4.	Continue to research and implement methods of reducing current disproportionality issues.
Who Is Responsible	Exceptional student education supervisor	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Action Plan 4-4

We recommend the district strengthen the evaluation and accountability component of the School Improvement Plans.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	The district should establish a mechanism to ensure that SIP goals are measurable, are based on school performance data, and that the goals and strategies match the school's needs, before being accepted and approved by the board.
	Step 2.	The district should provide technical assistance to any school with a SIP that does not include measurable goals, or whose strategies do not support goal attainment.
	Step 3.	The district should ensure that school staff and School Advisory Council members attend available training on developing SIPs for schools that repeatedly fail to submit comprehensive, measurable, and appropriate SIPs.
Who is Responsible	Deputy Superintendent for Curriculum Instruction and the Director of Curriculum Development and Implementation	
Time Frame	August 2004	

Action Plan 4-5

We recommend that the district develop guidelines for using technology for instructional purposes, including the amount of time students should use instructional technology.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Create and distribute guidelines based on available educational recommendations. The guidelines should detail how often teachers should use technology as an instructional tool.
	Step 2.	Create and distribute guidelines, based on available educational recommendations, detailing the time per week students at different levels should use technology for educational purposes.
	Step 3.	Track teacher and student usage to determine adherence to guidelines.
Who Is Responsible	Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Administration and Instructional Technology

Action Plan 5-1

We recommend the district review its strategic and technology plan to ensure that all district technology goals are included in the technology plan, that these goals meet SMART criteria (specific, measurable, attainable, reasonable and time-bounded), and that the plan implementation is annually monitored and updated.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Review strategies and goals in the district strategic plan.
	Step 2.	Identify all strategies and goals for utilizing technology, including technology goals for district support, instructional support and operational support needs.
	Step 3.	Include all technology-related strategies and goals in the District Technology Plan, ensuring that all are specific, measurable, attainable, reasonable, and time-bounded.
	Step 4.	Collect the information on progress toward meeting goals.
	Step 5.	At least every two years, evaluate progress on existing plan and adjust goals based in part on input from stakeholders on technology needs, availability of resources, and training needs.
	Step 6.	Report results to district management and to the board.
Who Is Responsible	Chief Technology and Information Services Officer, Director, Administrative and Instructional Technology, School Board	
Time Frame	June 2004	

Action Plan 5-2

We recommend the district revise the current needs assessment to provide additional data regarding software use and support training needs.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Revise current needs assessment to more appropriately gauge user needs, skills, and satisfaction with resources and professional development.
	Step 2.	Incorporate the use of NETS into the assessment process
	Step 3.	Assess all district personnel every other year.
	Step 4.	Incorporate data as goals and standards into following year's technology plan for training.
Who Is Responsible	Chief Technology and Information Services Officer, Director of Administrative and Instructional Technology, Director of Personnel	
Time Frame	December 2003 and ongoing	

Action Plan 5-3

We recommend the district revise the technology training process.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Using an updated needs assessment determine all classes of employees and technology support personnel's training needs.
	Step 2.	Review training schedules to maximize the number of staff who can attend.
	Step 3.	Select subgroups of district support technology staff to be certified to provide support of the various district operational systems.
	Step 4.	Using all data provided, coordinate training offerings with Personnel Services Department, ensuring that all training needs are met and no overlap occurs.
Who Is Responsible	Chief Technology and Information Services Officer, and Director of Personnel	
Time Frame	December 2003 and on-going	

Action Plan 5-4

We recommend the district train staff to use the work order system in a consistent manner and share information on past projects to help facilitate resolution of new problems.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Use staff meeting time to train technology staff on standard data entry practices for the technology work order system. This should include standardization of dates, work order categories, and resolutions
	Step 2.	Identify the individuals responsible for preparing monthly reports that will be shared and discussed at each meeting.
	Step 3.	Use this information to improve technology support staff's knowledge for responding to recurrent problems, to identify additional training needs, and to ensure that any future personnel additions recruit staff with specifically needed skills.
	Step 4.	Develop strategies to strengthen the technology support system. These could include: alternative uses for stipend funds, of approximately $60,000 for filling vacancies and using students or other volunteers to provide software or other appropriate support, ensuring these individuals do not have access to confidential information.
Who Is Responsible	Chief Technology and Information Services Officer	
Time Frame	June 2004	

Action Plan 5-5

We recommend the district train all personnel to use the district's email system and create usable email addresses for those who do not currently posses them.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Coordinating with Personnel Services, create an email system training schedule.
	Step 2.	Alert all personnel to training offerings and implement training.
	Step 3.	Identify personnel who do not possess email addresses during training and create usable addresses for them.
	Step 4.	Begin to disseminate information electronically rather than through the email system, to encourage staff to actively use their training and accounts and to improve the district's efficiency in disseminating information.
Who Is Responsible	Chief Technology and Information Services Officer, Director of Personnel Services	
Time Frame	December 2004	

Action Plan 5-6

We recommend the district establish standard procedures for analyzing technology decisions and services from the planning through the implementation phase and end-user satisfaction.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Based on an improved technology planning process, ensure that new purchases are cost effective, in that they meet district needs while also ensuring that integration plans with existing systems clearly outline training needs, timeframe for deployment, etc.
	Step 2.	Review past purchases to identify the positive and negative consequences of past decisions and apply this information to future acquisitions.
	Step 3.	Establish a method and questions to periodically assess user satisfaction with IT product, services and reports, and use this information to guide planning, acquisitions and service delivery
Who Is Responsible	Chief Technology and Information Services Officer, Director of Administrative and Instructional Technology	
Time Frame	December 2003 and periodically thereafter	

Personnel Systems and Benefits

Action Plan 6-1

We recommend that the Personnel Department compile and analyze climate survey information district-wide to assess and improve employee support.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Using data from all schools and centers in the district, compile climate survey information.
	Step 2.	Identify issues that can be addressed by the district.
	Step 3.	Use identified issues to drive goal-setting and implementation.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel Services, Director of Charter Schools	
Time Frame	December 2003 and annually thereafter	

Action Plan 6-2

We recommend that district staff use turnover and retirement data and exit interviews to identify future staffing needs and to assist in recruitment and retention efforts.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	The district should monitor separations by employment category, to ensure staff is aware of any trends suggesting increases in separations.
	Step 2.	During exit interviews and through other follow-up techniques, the district should solicit more specific information regarding employee reasons for leaving and information about employee experiences while employed.
	Step 3.	Survey new hires about the recruitment, hiring, orientation, and new employee support processes.
	Step 4.	Using anticipated retirement dates, ensure that staff are recruited and trained to fill critical positions in advance of the anticipated vacancy.
	Step 5.	Compiling the information from the described activities, identify employment issues that could effect recruitment and retention.
	Step 6.	Develop and implement strategies that would improve recruitment and retention efforts
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel Services	
Time Frame	December 2003 and annually thereafter	

Action Plan 6-3

We recommend that the district enhance its training program.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish long-term goals and objectives for district-wide training programs that support school and department goals and objectives (See Action Plan 3-1 for all steps needed to complete this phase).
	Step 2.	Create a standard method of surveying (or otherwise assessing) specific training needs by district, school, department, and/or category of employee beyond what is currently collected with the NAS (Needs Assessment Survey).
	Step 3.	Analyze data identifying needs.
	Step 4.	Coordinate training efforts among schools by implementing a district-wide on-line training calendar which principals can use to "advertise" courses offered at individual schools.
	Step 5.	During the annual principal planning meeting, include a training-planning agenda item with district staff development to ensure there is no overlap in the training offered at schools and that each school offer the training their academic data suggests are needed.
	Step 6.	Evaluate major training efforts and the progress toward meeting goals annually.
	Step 7.	Adjust course offerings based on the effectiveness of the training offered, school improvement plans, and assessed training needs based on survey information.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel Services	
Time Frame	June 2005 and annually thereafter	

Action Plan 6-4

We recommend that the district develop and institute an employee mentoring program for new career service employees.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	For departments with the greatest difficulty in recruiting and retaining career service employees, determine which categories of new employees would most benefit from on-the-job support.
	Step 2.	Develop a general mentor program to meet these support needs.
	Step 3.	Train relevant management personnel and as needed, volunteer mentors, on this support effort.
	Step 4.	Encourage supervisors to offer the program to new career service employees as applicable.
	Step 5.	Apply these same principles to other employee classifications as referenced in Best Practice 5 and 6 of this chapter.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel Services	
Time Frame	August 2004	

Action Plan 6-5

We recommend that the district improve its evaluation system for poorly-performing employees.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish more frequent evaluations of poorly performing staff.
	Step 2.	Ensure that all poorly performing employees are handled in accordance with established criteria and standards
	Step 3.	Ensure that opportunities to correct performance, through training, mentoring, referrals to employee assistance programs or other supports are provided.
	Step 4.	Document assistance provided and action taken.
	Step 5.	District personnel should monitor that appropriate actions are taking place and that follow-up is being done.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel Services	
Time Frame	December 2003 and ongoing	

Action Plan 6-6

We recommend that the district establish clear-cut and documented behavior criteria, evaluation procedures, and outcomes for managing behavior complaints and provide a copy to all employees.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Create clear behavior criteria and subsequent consequences.
	Step 2.	Provide written documentation to all employees of these criteria and potential outcomes.
	Step 3.	Maintain documentation of infractions and actions taken.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel Services	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Action Plan 6-7

We recommend that the district create and institute an absenteeism policy, compile and analyze annual absentee data by employee to identify excessive absenteeism or trends, and as indicated, consider alternative programs to reduce absenteeism.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Create a district-wide policy regarding absenteeism.
	Step 2.	Inform all employees of new policy.
	Step 3.	School designees should compile absentee data on all employees and analyze for trends or issues (including the categories of employees most absent, e.g. new employees, 10+ year veterans, etc.).
	Step 4.	Site-based administrators should review the absentee data analysis and address issues as needed.
	Step 5.	District personnel should monitor the tracking process and compile district-wide data and results annually.
	Step 6.	District personnel should use this information to assess the effectiveness of the sick day buy back program and determine if other strategies should be considered.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel Services, school Principals	
Time Frame	May 2004 and annually thereafter	

Action Plan 6-8

We recommend that the district annually compile and analyze substitute utilization data. We also recommend that district personnel research automated substitute management systems for possible implementation, weighing the potential costs and benefits.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Compile school-based substitute use for the district and analyze it for trends or issues. Address issues as needed.
	Step 2.	Research automated substitute management systems used by school districts of comparable size.
	Step 3.	Conduct cost comparison analysis of maintaining current system or implementing automated system.
	Step 4.	If more cost-efficient to implement new system, do so.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Personnel Services	
Time Frame	May 2004	

Facilities Construction

Action Plan 7-1

We recommend that the district develop a post-occupancy evaluation and apply this evaluation to all major projects.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop procedures to ensure that post occupancy evaluations occur at one year, three year, and five year intervals. These procedures should include evaluations of educational adequacy, function, safety, efficiency, and suggestions for future improvement.
	Step 2.	Contact the Department of Education Educational Facilities office for guidelines, sample post-occupancy evaluation surveys, and related information. Use this guidance to develop the district's post occupancy evaluation that includes:
		• An analysis of educational program improvements for consideration by future educational specification committees,
		• An operational cost analysis,
		• A comparison of the finished product with the educational and construction specifications,
		• Recommendations for future changes.
Who Is Responsible	Deputy Superintendent for Planning, Budgeting, and Systems Accountability, Executive Director of Facilities	
Time Frame	June 2004	

Facilities Maintenance

Action Plan 8-1

We recommend that the maintenance department annually survey customers.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop survey instrument with input from maintenance staff.
	Step 2.	Include questions relating to quality, timeliness, and cost of service.
	Step 3.	Survey principals and a random sample of teachers, students, parents and community members.
	Step 4.	Summarize and evaluate responses.
	Step 5.	Use results to evaluate the use of maintenance resources and make any needed adjustments.
Who Is Responsible	Deputy superintendent of planning, budgeting and systems accountability; and executive director of facilities	
Time Frame	November 2003	

Action Plan 8-2

We recommend that the district develop work standards for maintenance and custodial staff.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Work with district staff to determine appropriate facility standards for district facilities that may include: • frequency of task; • duration of task; • materials cost of task; • labor cost of task; and • comparisons to applicable professional standards and peer districts.
	Step 2.	Develop maintenance and operations criteria for the facility standards below. • Safety – environmental and occupational risks • Sanitation – frequency of cleaning • Security – protection of occupants and property • Functional performance – operating efficiently and economically • Physical condition – sound condition • Appearance – desired level of appearance
	Step 3.	Present standards and maintenance criteria to the superintendent for approval.
	Step 4.	Research appropriate sources, as needed, to prepare standards.
	Step 5.	Inform maintenance and custodial personnel of the work standards.
	Step 6.	Track the implementation of work standards and how employees meet those standards.
	Step 7.	Evaluate employee performance based on the standards.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Facilities, Director of Personnel Services, Manager of Facilities Maintenance, key hourly employees	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Action Plan 8-3

We recommend that the district conduct a needs assessment and use this information to prioritize work orders		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Analyze the existing list of outstanding facility improvements.
	Step 2.	Use this information, along with department goals, objectives and maintenance standards developed in Action Plans 3-1 and 8-2 to project manpower, budget, and equipment needs to complete the necessary facility improvements.
	Step 3.	Incorporate the results of the stakeholder survey described in Action Plan 8-1.
	Step 4.	Prioritize maintenance needs identified in the previous steps, and incorporate these plans into the strategic plan and annual goals and objectives, as described Action Plans 3-1.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Facilities and Manager of Facilities Maintenance.	
Time Frame	March 2004	

Action Plan 8-4

We recommend that the district develop a comprehensive training program and an apprenticeship program.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop a systematic way of identifying training needs and establish goals for each trades position.
	Step 2.	Identify training goals and how the training will benefit the district's operations and effectiveness.
	Step 3.	Develop a program of cross training for specific positions to improve efficiency.
	Step 4.	Establish an apprenticeship program.
	Step 5.	Provide an opportunity for staff feedback and evaluation to ensure training meets their needs.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Facilities, Director of Personnel.	
Time Frame	June 2004	

Action Plan 8-5

We recommend that the district consider subscriptions to trade publications and encourage active membership in trade organizations, within budgetary constraints.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Obtain input regarding most useful publications including non-cost options such as electronic newsletters and other courtesy publications available to school districts.
	Step 2.	Make publications available to all departmental staff.
	Step 3.	Prioritize identified trade memberships based on district information needs, funding availability and staff interests.
	Step 4.	The district should encourage active participation any joined trade organization.
	Step 5.	Specific opportunities should be developed so that trade group participants can share information with other team members.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Facilities, Manager of Facilities Maintenance	
Time Frame	October 2003	

Action Plan 8-6

We recommend that the district expand its preventive maintenance program to reduce costs.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Identify equipment and other components that will be included in a preventive maintenance program.
	Step 2.	Review equipment documentation and other material to identify the type and frequency of preventive maintenance tasks.
	Step 3.	Establish preventative maintenance teams composed of staff from each trade such as electrical, plumbing, carpentry, mechanical.
	Step 4.	Assign preventative maintenance teams on a scheduled basis to the buildings for an established period of time to work on previously submitted work orders and to assess what other needs may exist. Initially, until the backlog of work orders is pared down, the teams may stay in a high school for 5 days, a middle school for 3 days, and an elementary school for 2 days. Once the backlog of work orders is manageable, the number of days at each type of facility may be able to be adjusted.
	Step 5.	Prior knowledge of the work orders will allow the preventative maintenance team to pull together needed materials and equipment to respond to the work orders.
	Step 6.	Notify school administrators at least two weeks before scheduled visit to give them an opportunity to prepare and submit work requests. Scheduled preventative maintenance can occur during regular visit.
	Step 7.	Implement the preventative maintenance program.
Who Is Responsible	Executive director of facilities, manager of facilities maintenance	
Time Frame	October 2004	

Action Plan 8-7

We recommend that the district develop a corrective action plan to address facilities with ineffective energy management systems.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Use the energy audit described in Best Practice 15 of this chapter to identify facilities with opportunities to reduce energy consumption.
	Step 2.	Create and implement strategies.
	Step 3.	Periodically review consumption and update strategies as needed.
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Facilities, Manager of Facilities Maintenance	
Time Frame	December 2004	

Action Plan 8-8

We recommend that the district evaluate maintenance services to determine if any are suitable for privatization or if privatization should be continued.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Identify maintenance trade functions that could be privatized.
	Step 2.	Determine criteria to use in determining cost to privatize these functions.
	Step 3.	Perform analysis comparing vendor cost to in-house cost.
	Step 4.	Consider non-monetary variables, such as loss of district expertise or ability to react to changes in district policy and procedures, when performing this evaluation.
	Step 5.	Determine feasibility of privatizing or continuing to privatize maintenance trade functions based on the results of the comparison.
	Step 6.	Establish procedures to periodically perform analysis.
Who Is Responsible	Executive director of facilities, manager of facilities maintenance	
Time Frame	June 2004	

Action Plan 8-9

We recommend the district increase management efforts to use the existing work order system to improve efficiency and, as resources are available, to invest in a computerized maintenance management system that will coordinate tasks, personnel, budgets, and other functions of the maintenance department.	

Action Needed	Step 1.	Establish standard criteria for tracking staff time, effort and work
	Step 2.	Use the available information to the extent possible to improve efficiency and productivity,
	Step 3.	Create a committee to review computerized maintenance management system options to ensure that minimum capabilities include:
		• work management capabilities;
		• physical assets management capabilities;
		• resource management capabilities;
		• extensive management reporting capabilities;
		• preventive maintenance capabilities;
		• supports regulatory compliance;
		• multiple system interface capabilities;
		• interactive method for problem resolution;
		• compatible with Microsoft windows; and
		• system support and vendor reputation.
	Step 4.	As resources become available, select and install a computerized maintenance management system.
	Step 5.	Use the management reporting functions of any new system to improve accountability and efficiency.
Who Is Responsible	Executive director of facilities, director of information technology, director of personnel services	
Time Frame	December 2004	

Transportation

Action Plan 9-1

We recommend that the district research alternatives to determine the most cost-efficient method to improve the timely servicing and repair of the district's support vehicle fleet.	

Action Needed	Step 1.	Improve tracking of key unit cost information and perform a cost analysis of the district's maintenance operation.
	Step 2.	A school board representative or the superintendent should contact public entities such as the Alachua County Public Works or the University of Florida to discuss the possibility of a collaborative effort
	Step 3.	Based on this response and computed cost information, work with the entity to develop collaborative effort or explore the possibility of outsourcing this function to private vendors.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Transportation, Superintendent, and School Board	
Time Frame	March 2004	

Action Plan 9-2

We recommend that the district develop and implement a training schedule for maintenance staff which includes policies and guidelines on attendance of external training sessions, in-house training curriculum, and distribution of training materials and manuals.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	The supervisor of garage operations in consultation with lead mechanics and the director of transportation formulate a formal training schedule for in-service training which should include:
		• communication of the district's maintenance policies and procedures;
		• topics of current interest and concern;
		• distribution of technical service bulletins;
		• distribution of updates to maintenance operating manual;
		• additional guidance to staff;
		• a rotation schedule for external training sessions; and
		• distribution and incorporation of external training information into the in-service training schedule.
	Step 2.	The supervisor of garage operations, document the training received and provide a monthly report to the director of transportation on the progress and compliance to the schedule.
	Step 3.	The director of transportation and the executive director of facilities and transportation annually present the in-service training performance to the school board.
Who Is Responsible	Supervisor of Garage Operations, Director of Transportation, Superintendent, School Board	
Time Frame	September 2004	

Action Plan 9-3

We recommend the district conduct a detailed needs assessment for an automated vehicle maintenance management system and obtain a software package that meets the district's needs.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Including all users for input, the district should conduct a detailed assessment of the transportation department's needs for an automated vehicle maintenance management system that includes the following areas:
		• tracking itemized maintenance and other costs per vehicle [1];
		• parts usage per make or model;
		• tracking the life cycle of warranty parts;
		• integrating with the fuel system to track gas usage per bus;
		• tracking mileage per bus;
		• developing servicing schedules;
		• maintaining and summarizing billings to other departments;
		• identifying information for all vehicles (including operational status);
		• determining the life cycle of buses and other vehicles;
		• integrating with the district's mainframe system; and
		• developing key-unit cost indicators and cost analysis of the maintenance function.
	Step 2.	These areas include the required minimum information that the system should be able to track and monitor.
	Step 3.	Develop the minimum specifications for a fleet maintenance program that will address these needs
	Step 4.	Systematically review all available fleet maintenance packages in the market, considering vendor reputation, costs, and problems and benefits experienced by other districts currently using the software.
	Step 5.	Once the district has evaluated all packages, the district should approach other smaller counties that are looking to improve their fleet maintenance program, in order to purchase the software at a discounted price.
	Step 6.	The district should collaborate with Hillsborough County to learn from their recent experience at integrating their fleet maintenance program with the district's main data system. This collaborative should include ongoing discussions regarding successes, problems and solutions, and sending appropriate transportation and IT personnel to Hillsborough County to learn how to test, implement, and integrate the systems.
	Step 7.	The district should also collaborate, as needed, with the University of Florida Computer Science program for added expertise in integrating these systems.
	Step 8.	The director of transportation and executive director of Facilities and Transportation should develop a budget for an automated fleet maintenance management program in the transportation annual budget, including 5 year cost projections and present this information to the capital planning committee.
	Step 9.	The capital planning committee should review the feasibility of all budgets and projections and plan budgeting requirements before submitting these to the superintendent and school board for approval.
Who Is Responsible	Director of Transportation, Executive Director of Facilities and Transportation, Capital Planning Committee, Superintendent, and School Board	
Time Frame	December 2004	

[1] Including labor, tires, other parts, outside repairs, fuel and oil.

Action Plan 9-4

We recommend that the district develop cost information and compare the costs of contracted versus in-house bus operations to guide decision-making on whether to expand contracted services.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Assign the responsibility to develop comparative cost information to the director of transportation
	Step 2.	Implement Recommendation 9-4 to obtain a vehicle maintenance management system. (Best Practice 17 of this chapter)
	Step 3.	Develop a comprehensive analysis of the cost of district in-house bus operations using the automated vehicle maintenance system and other management information systems.
	Step 4.	Conduct a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to determine the market of viable contract bus providers followed by a bid process for bus operations.
	Step 5.	Conduct a comparison of the cost of in-house bus operations to contracting for these services.
	Step 6.	Use the comparative analysis as a basis for expansion or contraction of contracted operations and services
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Facilities and Transportation, Director of Transportation, Information Technology Department,	
Time Frame	June 2004	

Action Plan 9-5

We recommend that the district implement a performance accountability system, as outlined in Action Plan 3-1 and compare its performance to peer districts that are similar demographically.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop an accountability system as outlined in Action Plan 3-1.
	Step 2.	Select peer districts that are similar to the Alachua County School District.
	Step 3.	Review other school Florida school districts to identify those that have transportation programs and are demographically similar to the Alachua County School District. This criteria should consider:
		• the number of students served;
		• the size of the bus fleet;
		• the average bus occupancy;
		• the population density of the district;
		• the size and nature of the county (e.g. rural, coastal);
		• the average mileage per year; and
		• the number of magnet school programs and other county wide programs.
	Step 4.	Begin collecting and monitoring data related to transportation from existing data on the district's and peer performance
Who Is Responsible	Executive Director of Facilities and Transportation, Director of Transportation	
Time Frame	June 2004	

Food Service Operations

Action Plan 10-1

We recommend that the food service program establish clearly stated goals and measurable objectives for the food service program that reflect the expected outcomes and expenditures of the program.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop clearly stated goals and measurable objectives using examples in Exhibit 3-4 in Performance Accountability for guidance.
	Step 2.	Collect stakeholder input.
	Step 3.	Solicit specific input and approval from district administrators.
	Step 4.	Use the approved plan to develop the food service program annual budget and annually assess program performance.
Who Is Responsible	Food Service Director	
Time Frame	August 2004	

Action Plan 10-2

We recommend that the district revise the job description of the food service director to include having primary responsibility over the food service program with input from the school principals. Also, the district should consider establishing a formal advisory role for the food service director to assist in district and school level decisions that impact the food service program.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Revise the job description of the food services director to provide sole authority over school cafeteria personnel.
	Step 2.	Ensure that the food services director involves school principals in assessing school cafeteria operations and cafeteria manager evaluations.
	Step 3.	The district should consider a policy to involve the food service director as an advisory in district and school level decisions that impact the food service program, such as lunch periods, bell schedules, and bus arrival times.
Who Is Responsible	Food Services Director, Human Resources Director, Deputy Superintendent for Student and Community Services	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Action Plan 10-3

We recommend the food service program develop a shared manager program for cafeteria managers.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	The food service director identifies at least two sets of schools in close proximity that would be suitable for shared management and at least two existing managers that would be suitable
	Step 2.	When vacancies at the manager level occur, the identified managers should be encouraged to participate and be presented with facts concerning the increased pay responsibilities that go along with shared management. The food service director should attempt to fill the vacancies with shared managers.
	Step 3.	If successful, during the 2002-03 school year efforts should continue as attrition allows to average converting two shared manager positions each year thereafter. Successful implementation also depends on enough schools in close proximity to become available and enough managers leaving through natural attrition.
Who Is Responsible	Food Service Director	
Time Frame	August of each year, as manager vacancies occur	

Action Plan 10-4

We recommend that the district increase meals per labor hour standards to comply with industry standards to reduce labor costs and increase the meal equivalency standards.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	The food service director develops efficient meals per labor hour standards using appropriate industry standards as guidelines.
	Step 2.	Use updated meal equivalency standards for calculating meals served.
	Step 3.	Implement appropriate meals per labor hours standards to direct staffing and reduce overall labor costs
	Step 4.	Monitor schools on a quarterly basis to ensure standards are being met.
Who Is Responsible	Food Service Director	
Time Frame	December 2003	

Action Plan 10-5

We recommend that the food service program develop a systematic process to identify training needs.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Develop a tracking system that includes, but is not limited to area supervisor reviews, county health inspection reports, CRE, SMI, and USDA audit results, customer satisfaction, employee annual evaluations, internal audit results, and workers' compensation claims to identify potential training needs.
	Step 2.	Rank order identified training needs to allocate training resources.
	Step 3.	Create a staff development plan based on this comprehensive needs assessment that includes training goals and objectives linked to program performance.
	Step 4.	Periodically assess of how effective training programs are in meeting goals and objectives and revise training program accordingly.
Who Is Responsible	Food Service Director, Personnel Services Director	
Time Frame	December 2004	

Cost Control Systems

Action Plan 11-1

We recommend that the district cross-train all accounting functions, with cross-trained individuals periodically performing these alternate accounting functions to ensure continued competence.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Review the qualifications of staff currently assigned to the accounting area. The chief accountant, senior accountant, and program specialist should have the general knowledge necessary to perform most accounting functions. Other individuals could be cross-trained to perform other accounting functions based upon their aptitude and general knowledge.
	Step 2.	On a monthly basis, cross-train at least two accounting functions, until all functions are covered. The selected individuals should work closely with the individual performing the task for a period necessary to learn the intricacies of the new function while also completing normally assigned duties.
	Step 3.	The cross-trained individuals should perform the new function independently for a period of time.
	Step 4.	This individual should subsequently perform the new accounting function at least semi-annually.
Who is responsible	Chief Financial Officer	
Time Frame	March 2004	

Action Plan 11-2

We recommend that the district adopt a written procedure for reporting suspected improprieties and amend its recently completed employee manual to include this procedure.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Utilize the current verbally communicated procedure for reporting suspected improprieties as the basis for developing a written policy.
	Step 2.	Communicate this policy by amending the current employee manual to include written procedures supporting the policy.
Who is responsible	Deputy superintendent for planning, budgeting and systems accountability, chief financial officer and personnel.	
Time Frame	September 2004	

Action Plan 11-3

We recommend that the district's strategic plan be amended to tie the strategic plan to the budget process, and to incorporate a provision for the maintenance of an adequate unreserved fund balance.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Determine a prudent unreserved fund balance ratio based on expenditures. We believe a ratio from 3-5% of operating expenditures would be sufficient.
	Step 2.	Establish a long-term objective to maintain the recommended unreserved fund balance by a particular future fiscal year.
	Step 3.	Determine the level of unreserved fund balance the district will attempt to achieve in each of the next fiscal years, based on other funding and expenditure options.
	Step 4.	Incorporate the determined level of unreserved fund balance as an objective in the next update to the district's strategic plan.
	Step 5.	Redefine this objective annually and incorporate in each strategic plan update.
Who is responsible	School board, deputy superintendent for Planning, Budgeting, and Systems Accountability, and chief financial officer	
Time Frame	September 2004	

Note: This action plan should be implemented in conjunction with the recommendation in Management Structures, Best Practice 9.

Action Plan 11-4

We recommend that the district continue to conduct annual risk assessments.		
Action Needed	Step 1.	Continue to conduct annual risk assessments using district staff.
	Step 2.	Review the results of the risk assessment, prioritize high-risk activities, and assign responsibility for addressing and resolving prioritized risks.
Who Is Responsible	Deputy superintendent for Planning, Budgeting and Systems Accountability	
Time Frame	August 2004	