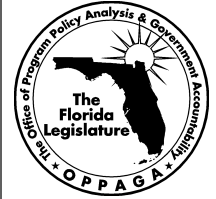




Office of Program Policy Analysis And Government Accountability



John W. Turcotte, Director

April 1998

Follow-Up Report on the Review of the Implementation and Impact of Blueprint 2000 Administered by the Department of Education

Abstract

- The Department of Education, Florida Commission on Education Reform and Accountability, and Florida Legislature have taken steps to assist schools in evaluating the impact of their school improvement initiatives and to address the problem of district employee domination of school advisory councils. (See pages 2,3, and 4.)
- The Department of Education could do more to assess the overall impact of its training and technical assistance and to identify areas in which school advisory councils, schools, and school districts need further assistance. (See page 3.)
- The 1998 Florida Legislature is considering several pieces of legislation that would address school advisory council membership problems as noted in the report. (See page 4.)

Purpose

In accordance with s. 11.45(7)(f), F.S., this follow-up report informs the Legislature of actions taken by the Department of Education and the

Florida Commission on Education Reform and Accountability in response to OPPAGA Report No. 95-53, which this office issued April 30, 1996. This report presents OPPAGA's assessment of the extent to which the Department and Commission have addressed the findings and recommendations included in our report.

Background

In 1991, the Legislature created Florida's system of school improvement and educational accountability, formerly referred to as "Blueprint 2000." A cornerstone provision of the system is to return responsibility for school improvement to those closest to the students, that is, the schools, teachers, and parents.

Florida law requires the State Board of Education to adopt rules necessary to implement a state system of school improvement and accountability and to set standards for gauging progress. The Legislature created the Florida Commission on Education Reform and Accountability to oversee the development, establishment, implementation, and maintenance of the system of school improvement and educational accountability from prekindergarten through 12th grade.

To facilitate implementation, the Legislature authorized the Department of Education to make procedural changes necessary to implement

educational accountability and school improvement policies. The Legislature also assigned the Department of Education the responsibility for training and assisting school district and school stakeholders.

State law requires district school boards to maintain a system of school improvement and educational accountability, with superintendents provided the authority to recommend procedures for implementing and maintaining this system. Individual schools are the units of educational accountability. Local school advisory councils assist schools by aiding in the preparation and evaluation of school improvement plans.

Our prior report reviewed the implementation and impact of this education reform initiative by examining local school improvement efforts, the overall effect of the initiative on local stakeholders and financial resource allocation, and school advisory council membership.

Prior Findings

OPPAGA has conducted three reviews of Florida's School Improvement and Educational Accountability initiative. At the time of the last review, OPPAGA found that the Department of Education, school districts, schools, and local community members were working together to improve the education of students in Florida. Virtually all school improvement plans we reviewed included goals and initiatives to improve student performance.

While most stakeholders reported they were beginning to see improvements, particularly in student performance, often they could not provide evidence that improvement had occurred. OPPAGA found that stakeholders needed assistance in developing measurable objectives, evaluating improvement initiatives, and determining the effect of factors such as student mobility. Stakeholders believed that the involvement of parents and others in the school

improvement process has increased but the allocation of financial resources or school-based decision making has not significantly changed as a result of state educational reform.

OPPAGA also found that school advisory council (SAC) membership problems had not improved since 1993-94. Almost half of the SACs still did not include all required stakeholder groups with school employees still dominating about two-thirds of SACs. The membership of about one-third of SACs was not reflective of the ethnic and racial diversity of their schools.

Current Status

The Department of Education, Florida Commission on Education Reform and Accountability, and Legislature have taken several actions to implement report recommendations.

Actions Taken by the Department of Education

The Department of Education has provided training and technical assistance to school districts and schools, which includes information on the evaluation of school improvement initiatives. For example, the department devoted one issue of its technical assistance document, "Wave Series," exclusively to strategies for evaluating the school improvement process.

The issue, sent to all school districts and school advisory councils, covered effective school advisory councils; needs assessments; and development of effective goals, objectives, and strategies. The document included information specifically on developing measurable, meaningful school improvement objectives. This kind of information should help stakeholders to develop clearer school improvement objectives and better evaluate the impact of school improvement initiatives.

The department also distributed materials to school districts that identified strategies to enhance

success for highly mobile students and information regarding the school improvement plan development and approval process. In addition, the department provided schools and school districts information on best practices including the development of district-wide evaluation methods for school districts with highly mobile student populations. This kind of assistance, especially the dissemination of best practices, should help schools and school districts better assess the impact of their initiatives on student performance.

The department has continued to make modules available for training new SAC members and provided a technical assistance memorandum to all district superintendents regarding SAC membership requirements. These actions should ensure that new SAC members understand their role and responsibilities and can fully participate in the school improvement process. This information also should help ensure that SAC membership is consistent with state law.

Suggestions for Further Action

The Department of Education should formally evaluate the overall effectiveness of its training and technical assistance provided to stakeholders involved in the school improvement process. This process should identify the particular issue or problem the department is trying to address, define succinct and measurable objectives related to resolving the problem, and collect evidence that demonstrates whether these objectives have been met.

For example, to evaluate its assistance to schools in developing better school improvement plans, the department could review the quality of objectives and evaluation methods included in a sample of school improvement plans developed prior to and after administering training or providing technical assistance in a particular district. By doing this, the department would be better able to determine the impact of its efforts and to identify areas in which school advisory councils, schools, and school districts may need further assistance.

Actions Taken by the Florida Commission on Education Reform and Accountability

The Florida Commission on Education Reform and Accountability (commission) has agreed to serve as a statewide advocacy group for SACs at the recommendation of the Commissioner of Education. The commission plans to create a task force consisting of SAC members to further define and clarify its role as an advocacy group. The commission should ensure that its role as an advocate for SACs does not conflict with its statutory mission to oversee the development, establishment, implementation, and maintenance of the system of school improvement and accountability.

The commission also is exploring ways to communicate directly with and obtain information from SAC members including using an Internet web page, a newsletter, and regional training sessions. These actions should better ensure that SAC members understand their role and responsibilities and can fully participate in the school improvement process.

The commission worked with OPPAGA to revise the commission's feedback report required by law to better identify areas in which local stakeholders need additional assistance and to obtain more useful information on the effectiveness of state and local improvement efforts. The commission also expanded the stakeholder groups to which it sends the feedback survey to include SAC chairs and teachers. These actions should help ensure that the commission obtains more and better feedback and that local educators receive needed information and assistance concerning the development of long-term plans and evaluation methods.

(Note: The 1997 Legislature amended Florida law to require that the Florida Commission on Education Reform and Accountability work with the Department of Education in developing the annual feedback report.)

Actions Taken by the Florida Legislature

Consistent with report recommendations, the 1997 Legislature amended state law to require that a majority of the members of each school advisory council not be persons employed by the district school board. The 1998 Legislature is considering legislation to require that a majority of the members

of each school advisory council not be persons employed by the district school board at the school where such person performs his or her primary duties.

The Legislature did not eliminate the requirement that the SACs of vocational-technical centers include students. As OPPAGA's report indicated, since vocational technical centers serve primarily adult students, it may not be necessary also to require their SACs to include parent members. The 1998 Legislature is considering legislation to remove this requirement.

(Note: Although OPPAGA did not make additional recommendations to amend state law, the 1998 Legislature is considering legislation to withhold lottery funds from school districts that do not comply with SAC membership composition requirements.)

OPPAGA provides objective, independent, professional analyses of state policies and services to assist the Florida Legislature in decision-making, to ensure government accountability, and to recommend the best use of public resources. Copies of this report in print or alternate accessible format may be obtained by telephone (850/488-0021 or 800/531-2477), by FAX (850/487-3804), in person (Claude Pepper Building, Room 312, 111 W. Madison St.), or by mail (OPPAGA Report Production, P.O. Box 1735, Tallahassee, FL 32302).

Web site: <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/>

Project supervised by: Jane Fletcher (850/487-9255)

Project conducted by: David D. Summers (850/487-9257)