Performance Accountability System

The Manatee County School District needs to develop a comprehensive performance accountability system to ensure that its major programs are meeting their intended purpose in the most cost-efficient manner.

Conclusion

The Manatee County School District is using two of eight performance accountability system best practices and is lacking in its use of best practices that address the performance of its major educational and operational programs. While the use of goals, objectives, performance measures, benchmarks, and evaluation varies by program, these activities should be greatly expanded. Improvements also should be implemented to increase the effectiveness of some schools’ improvement plans and improve the timeliness and overall accuracy of information. OPPAGA’s recommendations to bring the Manatee County School District into conformance with performance accountability system best practices can be implemented using existing resources if the school district implements recommendations made in Chapter 3 of this report. Below are OPPAGA’s conclusions on the district’s use of each performance accountability system best practice.

Is the District Using Performance Accountability System Best Practices?

No. The district generally has not established clearly stated goals and measurable objectives for its major educational and operational programs. (page 4-6)

No. The district does not use appropriate performance and cost-efficiency measures to evaluate its major educational and operational programs and has not used these in management decision-making. (page 4-11)

No. The district has not set performance and cost-efficiency benchmarks for its major educational and operational programs that may include appropriate standards from comparable school districts, government agencies, and private industry. (page 4-16)

No. The district does not regularly evaluate the performance and cost of its major educational and operational programs nor analyzed potential cost savings of alternatives, such as outside contracting and privatization. (page 4-19)

No. District management does not regularly review and use evaluation results to improve the performance and cost efficiency of its major educational and operational programs. (page 4-22)
No. The district does not report on the performance and cost efficiency of its major educational and operational programs to ensure accountability to parents and other taxpayers. (page 4-24)

Yes. The district does ensure that school improvement plans effectively translate identified needs into activities with measurable objectives. (page 4-28)

Yes. The district has established and implemented strategies to continually assess the reliability of its data. (page 4-32)

Fiscal Impact of Recommendations

There is no fiscal impact associated with recommendations to improve the district’s use of performance accountability system best practices. However, responsibility for ensuring the implementation of several recommendations is assigned to a newly created planning, accountability, and evaluation unit. The costs associated with the creation of this unit are addressed in Chapter 3 of this report.

Background

Educational systems must be accountable to parents and other taxpayers for the performance and costs of their academic programs and support services, such as transportation, facilities construction and maintenance, food services, and safety and security. In addition, an effectively administered school district has a central office that provides leadership and accountability through a lean, responsive organizational structure that maximizes the allocation of funds to the instructional program. This requires the central office to provide district-level direction by establishing goals, objectives, and measures. Manatee County School District officials identified several notable accomplishments in its performance accountability system. Exhibit 4-1 describes these accomplishments.

Exhibit 4-1

The Manatee County School District Has Accomplished a Number of Notable Things During the Last Three Years

- School district staff have received extensive training based on national standards for successful organizational performance.
- The school board has established three broad districtwide goal areas that emphasize the importance of high student achievement, safety, and cost efficiency and effectiveness.
- The district has no critically low-performing schools based on state minimum standards for student performance. However, several district schools have student performance approaching critically low status or at least one score below state minimum standards.
- Each school has a board-approved improvement plan consistent with state accountability requirements. Most school improvement plans focus on improving student performance.

Source: Manatee County School District
Since 1997, Manatee County School District staff received extensive training based on criteria established to help promote an understanding of the requirements for performance excellence and to promote sharing of information on successful performance strategies. These criteria are designed to provide organizations with an integrated, results-oriented framework for implementing and assessing processes for managing all operations. In addition, the Manatee County School Board has established three broad districtwide goal areas that emphasize the importance of high student achievement, safety, and cost efficiency, and effectiveness.

**State Initiatives Ensure Better Local Level Accountability**

School improvement plans are required by state law as part of a 1991 state initiative to ensure greater local-level accountability. This initiative is designed to provide high standards of student performance and to decentralize public education so school districts and schools are able to design learning environments and activities to better meet the needs of each student. The Legislature established state education goals in eight areas (as provided in Exhibit 4-2) as a framework for the school improvement initiatives of individual schools.

**Exhibit 4-2**

**State Education Goal Areas**

- Readiness to Start School
- Graduation Rate and Readiness for Postsecondary Education and Employment
- Student Performance
- Learning Environment
- School Safety and Environment
- Teachers and Staff
- Adult Literacy
- Parental Involvement

Source: Florida Statutes

While all schools must annually develop a plan that includes improvement initiatives, the specific state goals that schools include in their plans should reflect their particular needs. School advisory councils consisting of school employees and community members such as teachers, parents, students, and business and community citizens, assist schools in preparing and evaluating school improvement plans.

In 1997-98, 37 of the district's 38 schools had school board-approved school improvement plans. Although plans in the Manatee County School District focused on a variety of improvements, they most often focused on improving student performance. For more information on the focus of 1997-98 school improvement plans, refer to Exhibit 4-3.

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1 In 1997-98, the school district operated 38 schools. However, Haile Middle School, which opened in 1997-98, was not required by state law to have a school improvement plan.
### Exhibit 4-3

#### The Focus Areas of 37

**Manatee School Improvement Plans for 1997-98**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Plans Focusing on This Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Performance</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaleidoscope/Mosaic ¹</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Student Performance Goals</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Training ²</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Involvement/Adult Literacy</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation Rate and Readiness for Postsecondary Education and Employment</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Environment</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readiness to Start School</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Curriculum programs in elementary and middle schools

² All schools have staff development as part of their plan; however, some do not have it as a separate objective.

Source: Manatee County School District

In 1995, the State Board of Education established criteria for schools with critically low student performance based on each school’s performance on standardized assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics. Using the two most recent years of data, the Florida Department of Education groups each school into one of the four broad categories shown below.

- Six data points below minimum criteria established by the department
- Four or five low scores
- One, two, or three low scores
- No scores below state minimum criteria

Schools that fall into the first group are referred to as “critically low-performing.” Schools with four or five low scores are advised that student performance is "approaching critically low status." While the Manatee County School District has no critically low performing schools, four of its schools are approaching critically low status and 15 have at least one score below state minimum standards. Data available for the two most recent years, 1995 and 1996, is summarized in Exhibit 4-4 for the Manatee County School District and five peer school districts.
Several Manatee Schools Have
Student Performance Below State Minimum Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Alachua</th>
<th>Collier</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>Manatee</th>
<th>Marion</th>
<th>Sarasota</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Critically Low&quot;</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Approaching Critically Low Status&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schools with 1, 2, or 3 Scores Below State Minimum Criteria: 17, 10, 10, 15, 28, 16

Source: Florida Department of Education

Information Systems
Must Support District Accountability

District administrators and school board members need access to data and information to gauge district performance and to make critical decisions concerning issues such as resource allocation, program evaluation, development of alternative improvement strategies. Typically, this data is contained in district-level information systems. By centralizing information systems, a district ensures some level of consistency, accuracy, and reliability of information throughout the district. (The district’s Management Information System also is discussed on pages 3-37 and 12-20 of this report.

In the Manatee County School District, information is generally entered into the district’s databases by those entities responsible for gathering the information. Most financial and human resource information is entered and maintained by the individual departments. Student information generally is entered at the individual school sites. Information Services, which organizationally reports to Business Services, acts as facilitator for information requests and queries and transmits data to the Department of Education. Information Services is also responsible for the district’s mainframe hardware and software systems and the local area network hardware and software. The district also has an Instructional Technology (IT) function that is responsible for the information technology hardware and software used for instructional services in the schools; IT staff report to the Division of Academic Services.

Manatee County School District’s information infrastructure consists of hardware and software components that attempt to support the educational process through data processing and information delivery. All management information applications are handled on an IBM AS/400 platform. The software used in these applications is 10 to 15 years old. In May 1998, the AS/400 computers were upgraded to new Reduced Instruction Set Computer (RISC) systems designed for high-speed processing and capable of supporting new applications.

The district’s finance and human resource systems are being replaced to more effectively handle data. The district has entered into a contract with a private computer systems provider, to upgrade these systems. This includes making the systems Year 2000
compliant. During September 1998, the district was in the process of converting to this new system. Full system implementation is scheduled for July 1999. The district also is in the process of making the student database Year 2000 compliant. All recent technological changes are part of the district’s Information Systems Upgrade as highlighted in the District Technology Implementation Plan. Presently, the district does not have plans to upgrade its student information system.

**Are the Best Practices for Performance Accountability Systems Being Observed?**

**Goal:** The district is accountable to parents and other taxpayers for its performance and efficiency and effectiveness in providing services.

1. **Does the district have clearly stated goals and measurable objectives for its major educational and operational programs?**

No, while some administrative units have developed goals and objectives for major programs, this practice is not widespread. Thus, the district lacks a framework for many key decisions and actions regarding most major programs and services.

The district has not developed overall goals or outcome-based objectives for major operational programs, although many of these programs have annual objectives to prioritize their activities. (Refer to Exhibit 4-5, which lists the school district’s 12 major educational and operational programs.) In addition, goals and objectives should be refined for some major educational programs and developed for other educational programs. Because no single entity assists staff in developing goals and objectives, their efforts to develop a program-level accountability system are fragmented.

**Exhibit 4-5**

The School District Has 12 Major Educational and Operational Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Educational Programs</th>
<th>Major Operational Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Basic Education (K-3, 4-8, and 9-12)</td>
<td>• Facilities Construction and Facilities Maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exceptional Student Education</td>
<td>• Personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Vocational</td>
<td>• Asset and Risk Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• At-Risk (Dropout Prevention, Educational Alternatives, English for Speakers of Other Languages)</td>
<td>• Financial Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Transportation</td>
<td>• Purchasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Food Services</td>
<td>• Safety and Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Safety and Security</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Goals and Objectives Should Provide a Framework for Decisions

Goals and objectives establish a framework for key decisions and actions regarding programs. Without goals and objectives for each major operational and educational program, program staff can have difficulty establishing priorities for daily activities, identifying data to collect to assess whether a program or service is meeting expectations, and determining when they need to change strategies or program activities to better serve students. In addition, because each piece of a school district accountability system is interrelated, in the absence of an adequate set of program-level goals and objectives, it is difficult for program managers to provide needed direction and effective leadership that focuses on:

- continuously improving overall program performance;
- creating work processes that support efficient and effective accomplishment of performance objectives; and
- effectively communicating values, directions, and expectations as the basis for the district’s key decisions and actions.

Program-level goals and objectives also enable senior district administrators, such as assistant superintendents who are responsible for overseeing numerous related programs, to review the performance of programs in their administrative units. This aspect of leadership is crucial, because reviews help to provide rationale for and build consistency behind critical decisions such as allocation of resources. Exhibit 4-6 summarizes the basic elements of program goals and objectives.

Exhibit 4-6

Basic Elements of Program Goals and Objectives

A **program goal** is a long-range end towards which a program directs its efforts and should

- relate to the district’s mission, values, goals, priorities, and expectations;
- support state educational goals;
- reflect the intent (purpose) of the program; and
- incorporate state and federal program requirements.

A **program objective** is an action statement which defines how program goals will be achieved and should

- be either short-term (two to three years) or mid-term (four to five years);
- support the program’s goals;
- address major aspects of the program’s purpose and expenditures;
- be specific;
- be easily understood;
- be challenging but achievable;
- be measurable and quantifiable;
- identify data needed to assess whether progress toward an objective is being made; and
- indicate the performance outcome (result) or improvement target desired. For academic programs, objectives should be stated in terms of student outcomes (that is, the effect the program will have on participating students if the program is successful). For operational programs objectives should be stated in terms of the quality and cost of service provided.

Source: Literature review
Operational Programs
Do Not Have Goals and Objectives

The district has not developed overall goals for its major operational programs. However, operational programs such as facilities construction, facilities maintenance, personnel, food services, risk management, transportation, and safety and security have developed annual objectives. These objectives are stated as annual priority tasks for staff. These tasks do not clearly tie together to indicate the specific overall program goals or outcomes the unit is trying to accomplish such as increased quality service, meeting statutory requirements, efficient operations, cost savings, etc. For example, “assist in the reorganization of the Construction Services Department” does not describe what the district is trying to achieve with this reorganization such as decreased costs or increased timeliness. (For examples of 1999 fiscal year annual priorities, refer to Exhibit 4-7.)

Exhibit 4-7

Operational Programs Have Annual Priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Fiscal Year 1999 Priorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Balance workload within departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assist in the reorganization of the Construction Services Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prepare an operational procedures manual for this department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop baseline data to measure process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Update departmental procedures manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work with Information Systems to perfect the Applicant Tracking System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide means for certification and recertification</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Manatee County School District

Goals and Objectives for Educational Programs Should Be Expanded and Improved

The district has not developed districtwide goals and objectives for basic educational and exceptional student education programs. Although it has developed goals and objectives for its vocational and at-risk programs, some of these can be improved. Several of these at-risk programs (organizationally located in the district’s Special Programs Department) are federally funded, such as Title I, and must establish goals and objectives to receive funding. In addition, the district has established goals and objectives for other at-risk programs including dropout prevention. However, at-risk program goals and objectives do not yet clearly link to district budgetary decisions and, according to program administrators, need to more closely drive daily staff activities. Program administrators are in the process of clarifying and improving goals and objectives for all at-risk programs to ensure they are more measurable, link to district resource allocation decisions and staff activities, and include a process to assess progress. While the district is in the process of developing goals and objectives for basic education, which should be drafted by the fall of 1998, it has no time frame for developing goals and objectives for exceptional student education programs.

Staff Need Assistance in Developing Goals and Objectives

No single entity in the Manatee County School District is responsible for assisting staff in developing goals and objectives for the district’s major programs. Thus, district efforts to
develop goals and objectives for major educational and operational programs are uneven and fragmented. The degree to which staff have developed goals and objectives for programs not only is dependent on program requirements but also largely is a function of the organizational placement of the program. For instance, operational programs under the Division of Human Resources and Support Services and Division of Business Services operate under annual priorities, which do not relate to program-level goals or outcome-based objectives. Academic programs, such as at-risk programs, in the Division of Pupil Personnel Services have further developed goals and objectives than those for basic educational programs in the Division of Academics have. In order to develop a comprehensive program-based accountability system, staff need training on how to develop specific accountability components, such as goals and objectives, and how to link accountability components to the district budget process. In addition, to better ensure consistency across district administrative units, staff need a template that provides a format to guide them through the development of accountability system components.

**Recommendations**

- To better ensure the development of accountability system components, we recommend that the district develop a standardized accountability document to help guide staff through the process, provide accountability training to staff, and require that all major programs have clearly stated goals and measurable objectives. Action Plan 4-1 shows the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

**Action Plan 4-1**

**Develop Goals and Objectives for Major Programs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Strategy</strong></th>
<th><strong>Recommendation 1</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action Needed</strong></td>
<td><strong>Step 1:</strong> Develop an accountability framework for each program to guide staff through the development of the district’s program-level accountability system. The framework should contain a detailed format that includes the items listed below and instructions to guide the development of each item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Program name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Program purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Unit administering the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Person responsible for ensuring that the framework is completed and updated regularly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Program goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Program objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Performance measures by program objective, including a short explanation of how each relates to the program objective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Processes by program objective—the answer to the question, “What processes will you put in place to accomplish this objective?” providing an overview of implementation strategies, the person responsible for implementation, resources needed, and target date

• Human resource development—the answer to the question, “What training is needed (and for whom) in order to accomplish this objective?”

• Performance evaluation methods—including how often a performance evaluation will be conducted, by whom, and the answer to the question, “How will you know you have progressed toward or successfully completed the objective (your evaluation criteria)?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who Is Responsible</th>
<th>Planning, accountability, and evaluation unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time Frame</td>
<td>January 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal Impact</td>
<td>This can be implemented with existing resources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendation 2**

**Strategy**

Provide training on accountability.

**Action Needed**

**Step 1:** Using the concepts in Exhibit 4-6, “Basic Elements of Program Goals and Objectives,” as a guide, develop a training program that covers the topics below.

• The basic concepts of program accountability including goal, objective, performance measure, and evaluation plan development

• The use of the district accountability framework

• The district budget development process including district budget priorities and the connection between program goals and objectives and the allocation of program resources

**Step 2:** Provide training to each department head and program staff to enable them to develop accountability systems for their programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who Is Responsible</th>
<th>Planning, accountability, and evaluation unit, and budget director</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time Frame</td>
<td>February 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal Impact</td>
<td>This can be implemented with existing resources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendation 3**

**Strategy**

Develop program level goals and objectives.

**Action Needed**

**Step 1:** Develop 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. Major programs should, at a minimum, include the programs listed below.

• Basic Education (K-3, 4-8, and 9-12)

• Exceptional Student Education

• Vocational
• At-Risk (Dropout Prevention, Educational Alternatives, English for Speakers of Other Languages)
• Facilities Construction and Facilities Maintenance
• Personnel
• Asset and Risk Management
• Financial Management
• Purchasing
• Transportation
• Food Services
• Safety and Security

Step 2: Identify the purpose of each major program (from federal or state law, grant specifications, etc.) and the primary services provided by the district.

Step 3: Review school improvement plans to identify school-based needs as they relate to specific programs.

Step 4: Using information in Exhibit 4-6, "Basic Elements of Program Goals and Objectives," as a guide, develop short-term and mid-term objectives for each program goal based on the specific, measurable outcomes the district would like program to achieve. Each objective should relate to the program’s goals, the program’s intent and resources, children served, school needs, districtwide goals, and the district's expectations for the program.

Step 5: Identify key strategies that the district will implement to achieve each program objective. Use these strategies to set priorities for staff members’ daily work.

Step 6: Update goals and objectives annually based on legislative changes, changes in district goals, student needs, program resources, needs identified in school improvement plans, and program evaluation results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who Is Responsible</th>
<th>Program directors, assistant superintendents, other appropriate program staff, and the planning, accountability, and evaluation unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time Frame</td>
<td>March 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal Impact</td>
<td>This can be implemented with existing resources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 Does the Manatee County School District use appropriate performance and cost-efficiency measures to evaluate its major educational and operational programs and does it use these in management decision making?

No. The district has insufficient performance measures and no cost-efficiency measures and limited ability to extract data required to evaluate major programs.
The district has not established performance and cost-efficiency measures for its operational programs and only limited measures to evaluate and improve its major educational programs. Thus, administrators are restricted in their ability to address basic questions about program performance and cost and assess progress toward program goals and objectives. In addition, the district’s data system does not enable administrators to readily extract data in the format required to monitor trends. As a result, program staff indicate that they track performance on a limited basis.

**Measures Can Help the District Assess Programs**

Performance measures provide information on program quality and performance. Cost-efficiency measures provide additional information that links performance and quality to cost. Without a comprehensive set of performance and cost-efficiency measures that link to each program’s purpose, goals, and objectives, district administrators and school board members are restricted in their ability to assess programs to answer basic questions such as those given below.

- Should the district increase or decrease funds to a particular program?
- Are district services being provided in the most cost efficient manner?
- How could the district save money?
- What programs should be eliminated because of poor performance?
- Should the district implement a new program or service?
- Should the district contract for services?

Exhibit 4-8 summarizes the basic elements of program performance measures.

**Exhibit 4-8**

**Basic Elements of Program Performance Measures**

A *performance measure* is data collected to indicate progress toward program goals and objectives and should be

- logically related to the program’s primary purpose, goals, and objectives;
- comprehensive and easy to understand;
- able to be tracked over a long period of time;
- show a clear relationship to intended outcomes;
- related to the district’s primary mission, goals, and objectives as stated in its strategic plan;
- assess whether the program is achieving its fundamental goals and objectives;
- used to evaluate program performance; and
- able to link program performance to program costs so they are useful for budgetary decisions.

**The District Has Insufficient Measures**

The district has not established performance measures for its operational programs and has only limited measures to evaluate and improve its major educational programs. The school district and schools annually publish the *School Public Accountability Report* and distribute it to parents and the community. This report, which is mandated by Florida law, includes school progress on 16 performance measures relating to the state’s eight education goals for public education (refer to Exhibit 4-9). It also describes the schools’ progress in implementing their improvement plans and the use of lottery funds. The intent
of this report is to enable the public to obtain general information about school performance and management of lottery funds. However, the School Accountability Report does not contain program-specific information on the performance and cost of district programs. The district has established performance-related measures only for programs for at-risk students. These measures are generally identified in each program’s evaluation plan. However, at-risk program evaluations are just beginning to include recommendations to improve program outcomes. In addition, the district has not established cost-efficiency measures for major educational and operational programs.

Exhibit 4-9

The School Accountability Report Contains General Educational Program Performance Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State Goals</th>
<th>Performance Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Readiness to Start School</td>
<td>1. The number and percentage of students meeting the state expectations for school readiness as determined by a formal observation of each kindergarten student using an instrument that meets guidelines developed by the state Department of Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2  Graduation Rate and Readiness for Postsecondary Education and Employment | 2. The number and percentage of students who graduate from high school as defined by Florida law  
3. The number and percentage of students 16 years or older who were reported as dropouts at the end of each school year  
4. The number and percentage of students who meet the state levels in reading, writing, and mathematics for placement into college-level courses  
5. The number and percentage of graduates who are employed, enrolled in postsecondary programs, or enlisted in the military using the most available data |
| 3  Student Performance                                   | 6. Student performance results on state-designated external student assessments at various grade levels, including Florida Writes!, the High School Competency Test (HSCT), and locally administered norm-referenced tests at grades 4 and 8 |
| 4  Learning Environment                                  | 7. Results of an annual locally administered school learning environment survey  
8. The number and percentage of teachers and staff who are new to the school at the beginning of each school year  
9. The number and percentage of students absent 11 to 20 days and 21 days or more each year  
10. The average number of days teachers and administrators were not in attendance at the school for reasons classified as personal leave, sick leave, and temporary duty elsewhere |
| 5  School Safety                                           | 11. The number of incidents of violence, vandalism, substance abuse, and harassment on the bus, on campus, and at school-sponsored activities |
| 6  Teachers and Staff                                     | 12. The number and percentage of classes taught by out-of-field teachers  
13. The number and percentage of teachers, administrators, and staff who receive satisfactory annual evaluations based on the district assessment system  
14. The number and percentage of teachers in schools who have earned degrees beyond the bachelor’s level |
| 7  Adult Literacy                                          | 15. The number of adult students served by the district earning a State of Florida High School diploma either by earning credits and taking the High School Competency Test (HSCT) or taking and passing the General Education Development (GED) tests |
| 8  Parental Involvement                                   | 16. The number and percentage of school advisory council members by membership type and racial/ethnic category |

Source: Department of Education
The District’s Data System Limits Administrators’ Ability to Effectively Manage Programs

In addition to lacking performance measures for many programs, the district’s data system does not enable district administrators to readily extract data in the format required to monitor trends. As a result, they track performance on a limited basis. The district has tracked student test scores on norm referenced tests, Florida Writes!, the High School Competency Test, and college entrance tests from 1991-1997. The district provided this data to school administrators but did not use it for in-depth evaluation of program performance. Some senior district administrators indicate that they track measures manually. This includes extracting data from the district database and manually manipulating and tracking student academic scores by school in reading and writing to monitor program performance. Basic information such as test scores should be readily available and in a useable format for district administrators. Manually manipulating and tracking performance data is time-consuming and inefficient. (For more information on the district’s data system, refer to pages 3-37 and 12-20)

Recommendations

- We recommend that the district develop performance and cost-efficiency measures for major programs. Developing these measures will better enable district administrators and school board members to address basic questions about program performance and cost and assess progress toward program goals and objectives.

- As part of performance measure development, we recommend that program staff identify and prioritize data needs. This will better ensure that data is available to assess program performance and cost.

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

Action Plan 4-2

Develop Performance and Cost-Efficiency Measures for Major Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation 1</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Action Needed</strong></td>
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</table>
- Use the accountability framework developed by the district’s Planning, Accountability, and Evaluation unit.
- Identify detailed input and outcome measures and indicators of efficiency and effectiveness. Focus on desired results and outcomes not just on activities.
- Identify how performance measures link to the budget and the measures in the district strategic plan.

**Step 3:** Clearly define the measure (some measures such as “absenteeism” may mean something quite different, depending on who defines it) and make sure that it measures what is intended. Try to stay away from measures that could easily be misinterpreted.

**Step 4:** For each performance measure, 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 be reported to and how often?
- How should the data be used?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who Is Responsible</th>
<th>Program directors and appropriate program staff with the assistance of the planning, accountability, and evaluation unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time Frame</td>
<td>August 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal Impact</td>
<td>This can be implemented with existing resources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Recommendation 2

**Strategy** Identify data needs and develop a system for approving data requests.

**Action Needed**

1. Identify and prioritize data needs by classifying data into the two categories below.
   - Data currently available, accessible, and in the format needed to determine progress toward program goals and objectives and
   - Data currently either not available, accessible or in the format needed to determine progress toward program goals and objectives.

2. Establish and implement a districtwide process for approving data requests made to the Information Systems unit. This policy may include review and signoff from department managers or assistant superintendents and how the data relates to program goals and objectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who Is Responsible</th>
<th>Assistant superintendents with the assistance of the management information systems unit</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time Frame</td>
<td>August 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal Impact</td>
<td>This can be implemented with existing resources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 Does the Manatee County School District have performance and cost-efficiency benchmarks for its major educational and operational programs that may include appropriate standards from comparable school districts, government agencies, and private industry?

*No, the district has not established performance and cost-efficiency benchmarks for its major programs. Thus, district administrators cannot adequately assess program performance and cost.*

The district has not created a comprehensive set of performance and cost-efficiency benchmarks and compares performance and cost to entities such as other school districts, government agencies, and the private industry on a limited basis. Thus, administrators and the school board cannot determine whether program performance and cost are acceptable.

**Benchmarks Can Help the District Interpret Performance and Cost-Efficiency Data**

Without a comprehensive set of performance and cost-efficiency benchmarks that link to each program’s purpose, goals, and objectives, district managers and school board members can have difficulty interpreting performance and cost-efficiency data to enable them to address basic questions such as those noted below.

- Where do we stand in relation to others delivering similar programs and services?
- Is current program performance adequate?
- Are program or service costs reasonable?
- Could staffing or resource levels be reduced?
- Who is doing something out there better than we are?
- What are others doing that we are not, and how can we change to mirror their performance?

Exhibit 4-10 summarizes the basic elements of benchmarks.
Exhibit 4-10

Basic Elements of Benchmarks

**Benchmarking** is comparing the actual performance and cost of major programs and services to acceptable standards, including the performance of other organizations, to identify differences and opportunities for improvement. Benchmarks should

- include comparisons to other school districts, government agencies, and private industry that provide the same or similar services;
- include comparisons to best-in-class organizations (models), best practices, and generally accepted industry standards;
- be easy to understand and make sense;
- show a clear relationship to critical outcomes;
- be based on reliable and comparable data;
- be used to identify reasons for differences in performance or costs and to make improvements; and
- be developed at the same time as goals and objectives and updated annually.

Source: Literature review

The District Has Not Established Adequate Benchmarks

The district has not established benchmarks that would enable it to compare district program performance and cost to established standards. The academics division is in the process of developing benchmarks as part of its *Strategic Direction* document, which will be completed in the fall of 1998. Insufficient reliable data may have contributed to the lack of benchmark development, particularly for operational programs. For example, the district does not collect data that would enable it to determine the average time to do certain routine jobs such as to change air conditioner filters. Therefore, according to district administrators, they cannot reliably determine whether individual staff members take too long to perform these functions. As a result, the district has limited data to determine how efficient and effective it is.

The District Should Expand Its Use of Comparative Data

The district has conducted studies comparing selected district services to those in other school districts. District staff members are collecting data to compare Manatee County School District staffing levels against other school districts. According to district staff, 1997 data will be used to evaluate staffing levels for selected positions such as principals, assistant principals, and non-instructional staff. In addition, district administrators conduct comparisons on individual issues such as the number of staff and costs of buildings compared to other school districts. For example, in January 1996, the school board directed district staff to research outsourcing custodial services for a new middle school. This research included surveys of seven Florida school districts (Brevard, Broward, Dade, Orange, Osceola, Sarasota, and Seminole) and cost comparisons with private cleaning service companies. Based on staff research, in June 1997, the Manatee County School Board voted not to outsource custodial services at the school site. However, district staff indicate that their use of comparative data on program performance and cost is limited.
Recommendations

- We recommend that the district develop benchmarks for its major educational and operational programs. This will better enable the district to assess whether the performance and cost of these programs are acceptable. District administrators and school board members also could use this information in decision-making and to identify ways to improve.
- Action Plan 4-3 shows the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 4-3

Developing Benchmarks

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<th>Recommendation 1</th>
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|                  | Step 7: Identify other standards, such as trend analysis data, minimally acceptable performance, or generally accepted industry standards, to judge program performance or
cost-efficiency (especially of commonly provided services such as square footage cleaned per custodian, how often preventative maintenance should be performed on a vehicle, etc.). Identify whether other stakeholders such as the public, teachers, school board members, etc., should be involved in developing these standards.

Step 8: Determine how the data will be used to draw conclusions about Manatee County School District programs. For example, establish standards by determining whether Manatee County School District program performance will be compared to the average of the peer districts, the highest performing organization, the organization with the lowest cost, etc.

Step 9: Set a schedule to collect performance data from benchmarking organizations. Determine the items below.
- Specific school district staff person(s) accountability for collecting benchmark data
- Source for school district and benchmark data
- Timelines for collection and reporting benchmarking data

Step 10: Collect the data from benchmarking organizations. Measure the performance of best-in-class organizations for each performance measure.

Step 11: Measure performance and identify gaps between Manatee County School District programs and those of the benchmarking organizations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who Is Responsible</th>
<th>Program directors and appropriate program staff with the assistance of the planning, accountability, and evaluation unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time Frame</td>
<td>October 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal Impact</td>
<td>This can be implemented with existing resources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Does the Manatee County School District regularly evaluate the performance and cost of its major educational and operational programs and analyze potential cost savings of alternatives, such as outside contracting and privatization?

No, the district does not regularly evaluate the cost of its major programs or analyze the cost savings attributed to program alternatives. Increased evaluation would help the district identify ways to improve performance and reduce costs.

Because the district lacks performance measures, baseline data, and benchmarks, it cannot adequately evaluate the performance or cost of many programs. While the district conducts program evaluations, these often focus on compliance with the law and not on overall program outcomes. In addition, district administrators do not conduct cost-benefit analyses of major programs and research alternative service delivery methods on a limited basis.
Regular Evaluation Can Identify Ways to Improve Programs

Ongoing, routine program evaluations provide a means to pull together essential accountability information and make conclusions about the performance and cost of major educational and operational programs. Without this information school board members and district administrators can have difficulty determining the extent to which programs are progressing towards stated goals and objectives and identifying ways to improve. Program evaluations should help the school district

- demonstrate the merits of district programs and services;
- monitor and identify ways to reduce program costs; and
- identify areas in need of improvement and adjust curricula, instruction, and teaching materials better ensure that programs and services meet district expectations.

Exhibit 4-11 summarizes the basic elements included in program evaluations.

Exhibit 4-11

Basic Elements of Program Evaluations

**Program evaluation** is the periodic review of the worth or merit of a program or service. These evaluations should report how well a program is accomplishing its goals and objectives and include the information below.

**General Background Information**

- Program purpose, goals, objectives, delivery methods, and program resources (dollars and staff)

**Performance Information Based on Performance Measures and Benchmarks**

- Amount of workload accomplished (outputs)
- Numeric indicators of program results that indicate quality, effectiveness, and amount of “need” that is or is not being served (outcomes)
- Amount of input related to (divided by) amount of output or outcomes (efficiency)

**Other Explanatory Information**

- Elements substantially out of the control of the school district or program that affect program accomplishments
- Elements over which the district has significant control, such as staffing patterns

**Recommendations for Improvement**

- Changes to improve a program or service including alternative strategies or delivery methods such as contracting out specific tasks or privatizing entire programs or services
The District Cannot Adequately Evaluate Programs

Program evaluation is limited because the district lacks performance and cost-efficiency measures, baseline data, and benchmarks to evaluate many programs, particularly basic academic and operational programs. While the district conducts internal audits, these focus on internal control structures and generally not on the performance and cost-efficiency of district programs. The district has most extensively conducted program evaluations of At-Risk programs including Dropout Prevention, Title I, Accelerated Literacy Learning, Title I Media Productions, and English for Speakers of Other Languages. However, these evaluations often have not been based on pre-established performance measures or linked to program goals, objectives, and resources.

At-Risk Program staff members indicate that, while past evaluations focused on whether a program was in technical compliance with the law, future evaluations will better address program performance. The Special Programs Department developed a form that requires staff to pull together and track certain information and data related to program performance. While program managers collected some of this information in the past, in 1998, program managers will be required to formally collect more extensive program information that will enable them to evaluate program performance. For the 1998-99 fiscal year, At-Risk Program staff must indicate the program’s goals, objectives, and activities and include an evaluation component and the person responsible for evaluation. According to division administrators, these changes are intended to better ensure that program staff members develop a comprehensive set of objectives and performance measures and collect baseline performance data needed to develop performance benchmarks and assess At-Risk Program performance.

District Staff Research Alternatives on a Limited Basis

The district conducts research on alternative delivery methods of selected services on a limited basis. For example, a May 1998 district review of contracted occupational and physical therapist positions found that the district could save between $300,000 and $500,000 if it employed these individuals directly. According to district staff, the district has not made changes based on the findings of this review. In addition, the school board has directed staff to research the advantages of alternative service delivery methods on a selected basis for issues such as outsourcing custodial services. However, the district does not evaluate the potential benefits of alternative service delivery methods, including contracting out or privatizing, entire programs such as the Food Services Program or the district Transportation Program.

Recommendations

- We recommend that the district expand the information included in program evaluations. This would provide information on the progress toward program goals and objectives using pre-established performance and cost-efficiency measures. This also would enable district administrators to project future resource and training needs.
- Action Plan 4-4 shows the steps needed to implement this recommendation.
**Action Plan 4-4**

**Evaluate District Programs**

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<th>Recommendation 1</th>
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<td><strong>Strategy</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Who Is Responsible</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Time Frame</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fiscal Impact</strong></td>
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**5**

**Does the Manatee County School District management regularly review and use evaluation results to improve the performance and cost-efficiency of its major educational and operational programs?**

No, the district cannot demonstrate how it uses evaluation results to improve program performance and cost-efficiency of its major educational and operational programs.

Evaluations of major district programs, when conducted, generally do not include recommendations for improvement. In contrast, internal audits often contain recommendations to improve internal controls. However, because no one position is responsible for overseeing and reporting on implementation of internal audit recommendations, district staff are unclear about the status of recommendation implementation. Thus, problems identified in internal audits may persist.
Recommendations to Improve Programs Should Be Expanded and Implemented When Appropriate

As indicated on page 4-19, program evaluations, when conducted, generally focus on compliance with legal requirements and do not include improvement recommendations. However, internal audits often contain recommendations to improve internal control systems, such as establishing better procedures to ensure employees do not falsify timesheets or to control a dramatic increase in the number of companies providing fringe benefits to district employees. District staff provided conflicting information as to whether internal audit recommendations had actually been implemented. Some staff indicated that recommendations contained in internal audit reports generally are not implemented and often problems identified persist. These staff provided specific information on a sample of audits that identified several recommendations to improve district operations had not been implemented. For example, 10 of 14 recommendations made in an audit of payroll services issued in August 1996 had not been implemented as of May 1998. However, other staff indicated that some of these recommendations had or were being implemented. Staff confusion over the status of recommendation implementation may stem from the absence of one district-level position responsible for overseeing and reporting on the implementation of internal audit recommendations.

School Board and Superintendent Receive Insufficient Performance and Cost-Efficiency Information

Assistant superintendents provide update packets to the superintendent each Friday. These ‘Friday reports’ contain information school board members specifically request or other information that staff may provide related to school district issues. The superintendent distributes these packets to all school board members. But, because the district lacks adequate performance measures, baseline data, and benchmarks, the performance and cost-efficiency data provided in these reports varies depending on the type of data requested by individual school board members and the additional performance information that staff members may provide.

Recommendations

- The district’s implementation of recommendations for Accountability Systems Best Practices 1-4 should ensure additional performance and cost-efficiency information is available to the school board and superintendent. This additional information also will enable staff to review program performance and cost-efficiency and to make recommendations for improvement. However, to better ensure the use of evaluation results in district decision-making, we recommend the development of an annual performance and cost-efficiency report that summarizes this information.
- Action Plan 4-5 shows the steps needed to implement this recommendation.


**Action Plan 4-5**

**Increase Use of Evaluation Results**

<table>
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<th>Recommendation 1</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy</strong></td>
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</table>
| **Action Needed**| Step 1: Develop an annual report on the progress toward district strategies plan, which should include a summary of evaluation results of each major program, recommendations for improvement, and future resource needs. This report should be provided to the school board and superintendent. The report should be used to revise the district strategic plan, revise district goals, and develop the district budget for the upcoming year. For more information on the district's strategic plan, refer to page 3-27.  
Step 2: Adopt a district policy that requires the evaluation, accountability, and evaluation unit regularly (e.g., six months after an audit or the annual report is completed) report to the superintendent and school board on the status of recommendation implementation. In cases in which recommendations have not been implemented, the unit should provide justification, such as alternative strategies have been implemented, or rationale when no action is taken. |
| **Who Is Responsible** | The planning, accountability, and evaluation unit and school board |
| **Time Frame** | November 2000 |
| **Fiscal Impact** | This can be implemented with the existing resources. |

6

**Does the Manatee County School District report on the performance and cost-efficiency of its major educational and operational programs to ensure accountability to parents and other taxpayers?**

*No, the district has established various committees that act as liaisons to the public. The district provides these committees available performance and cost-efficiency information, but it lacks the information needed to be held fully accountable to parents and other taxpayers.*

The district has citizen committees in place to provide the public an opportunity for input and feedback on district issues. While the district provides some information to school advisory councils, parents, and other taxpayers, it lacks adequate performance measures, baseline data, and benchmarks, to provide the complete performance and cost-efficiency information to the public.
The District Has Established Committees for Public Input and Feedback

The Manatee County School District has established liaison committees that provide community input and feedback on a wide range of district-related issues and receive information on district performance. (Refer to Exhibit 4-12, for a list of the committees.) The largest of these committees, the Joint Parent Organization (JPO), is comprised of 76 members. The district established the JPO to improve communication between district administrators and the parent members of several school-based committees, such as school advisory councils and parent teachers’ organizations. District administrators also indicated that the JPO provides the district a forum to publicly report on the performance and cost-efficiency of district programs.

According to district administrators, the JPO reviews topics such as sales tax increases, school district construction projects, school safety, and legislative issues affecting the school district and receives available information on the performance and cost-efficiency of the district’s major educational and operational programs. This information includes the school district’s annual budget, recent school safety reports, legislative issue updates, and any other information specifically requested by the JPO members. Generally, the superintendent or an assistant superintendent orally presents this information to JPO members.

JPO members we interviewed indicate that they would like more control over setting the agenda or having a non-school district employee chair the meetings with the superintendent acting as meeting facilitator. This would allow the meetings to focus more on parent concerns about the school district, which may include issues such as performance, cost-efficiency, etc. According to district staff, the district supports parents assuming a more active role in conducting JPO meetings including setting the agenda. However, district staff indicate that JPO members have not widely supported this concept in the past.
### Exhibit 4-12

The District Has Established Several Liaison Committees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Committee</th>
<th>Purpose of Committee</th>
<th>Meeting Schedule</th>
<th>Number of Members</th>
<th>Groups Represented</th>
<th>Reports Generated or Information Received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joint Parent Organization</td>
<td>To strengthen the lines of communication between the SAC/PTO/PTAs and the administration office</td>
<td>Monthly during school year</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>SAC, PTO, PTA</td>
<td>Review topics such as sales tax, construction, safety, legislative issues, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety Committee</td>
<td>To provide an administrative perspective on district safety needs; to review safety initiatives and recommend organizational approaches to improve student safety</td>
<td>Monthly during school year</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>School administrators, elected officials, business and community leaders</td>
<td>Review suspension incidences, weapons possessions, Safe School Funds, Risk Management, legislative issues, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO Roundtable</td>
<td>To provide leadership, communication and coordination among agencies to ensure an integrated system to provide for local children and families</td>
<td>Every other month</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Elected officials, government and community leaders</td>
<td>Legislative issues, district programs and initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Alliance</td>
<td>To provide a coordinated effort to promote excellence in education throughout the community</td>
<td>Monthly during school year</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Educators, business and community leaders* *Members represent all races and geographic areas of district</td>
<td>Information resource for parent involvement, safe learning environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manatee County Schools Foundation</td>
<td>To support and enhance education resources to maximize the students' potential for the community and beyond</td>
<td>Monthly during school year</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>CEOs, community leaders/members, education representatives</td>
<td>Review innovative education programs; Teacher of the Year input; principal and superintendent input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Partners (Chamber of Commerce)</td>
<td>To promote the enrichment of education through business/education partnerships</td>
<td>Monthly during school year</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>School business partners and community volunteers</td>
<td>Involved in Project Teach, Partners In Excellence Award, and Business Partners training seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget Committee (Chamber of Commerce)</td>
<td>To provide an external perspective on district budget issues; to share knowledge and resources to ensure an efficient and effective budget process</td>
<td>Monthly during school year</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Administrators and business leaders</td>
<td>Involved in Technology Implementation Plan, Risk Management, review of employee benefits, advise on overall budget processes; issues recommendations to school board</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Manatee County School District
The District Annually Provides Information to the Public

As required by state law, by November 15 each year the district mails to each parent a copy of the school accountability report for their child’s school. In addition, the Bradenton Herald, with a weekday circulation of 42,340 and Sunday circulation of 54,464, periodically runs stories on the individual schools, which include portions or all of the school accountability report. The school accountability report contains a variety of data including the items presented below.

- Graduation rates
- Florida Writing Assessment Test scores
- High School Competency Test Scores
- Training and placement rates
- Dropout rates
- Student attendance rates
- Teacher and administration attendance rates
- Violence on campus data
- Evaluation of teachers

The District Should Provide More Information to the Public

While the school accountability report provides parents and other taxpayers generalized performance data at the school level, it does not provide similar information on operational programs and provides no cost-efficiency data. This stems from the fact that the district lacks adequate performance measures, baseline data, and benchmarks, to provide complete performance and cost-efficiency information to the public. This additional information would enable the public to hold the district more accountable by obtaining answers to questions such as those below.

- What is the public getting for its investment in public education?
- How efficiently is the district operating?
- How effective are district operations?
- Is the performance of particular district programs, such as transportation or facilities construction, acceptable?
- Should the district consider alternatives such as contracting out particular programs?

Recommendations

- The district’s implementation of recommendations for Accountability Systems Best Practices 1-4 should ensure the availability of additional performance and cost-efficiency information. However, to ensure this information is available to parents and to other taxpayers, we further recommend that the district provide information in the annual report to the various districtwide committees and to others upon request.
- Action Plan 4-6 shows the steps needed to implement this recommendation.
Action Plan 4-6  

Increase Public Reporting

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<th>Recommendation 1</th>
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<td><strong>Strategy</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Action Needed</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Who Is Responsible</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Time Frame</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fiscal Impact</strong></td>
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7 Does the Manatee County School District ensure that school improvement plans effectively translate identified needs into activities with measurable objectives?

Yes, the district has established effective mechanisms that ensure school improvement plans translate identified needs into activities with measurable objectives and clear implementation strategies.

The district does an effective job of ensuring that school improvement plans are of high quality and contain measurable school improvement objectives and clear strategies. While the district generally meets this best practice, it should do more to ensure that all school advisory councils include required members so the councils act as an effective link between schools and the local community.

Schools Receive Assistance to Develop Plans

The Office of School Management in the Division of Academics assists schools in developing their improvement plans. The office provides specific feedback to increase the measurability of school improvement objectives and to clarify and improve evaluation methods. In addition, to guide the school improvement process and ensure that all plans contain information to be effective, the Office of School Management has developed a format for all Manatee County School District improvement plans. (See Exhibit 4-13.)
Exhibit 4-13

The Manatee County School District’s Comprehensive School Improvement Plan Format

- A School Improvement Plan Summary that provides overview of the plan, in a table format, and lists each improvement objective included in the plan by state education goal and the target group affected
- Definitions of adequate progress for the entire plan and for each state education goal included in the plan
- The signatures of each school advisory council member
- A Needs Assessment Summary Conclusions table that provides the rationale for state education goals and improvement objectives included in the plan based on the school’s needs assessment and data analysis
- A detailed format that requires school to indicate the information noted below for each objective
  1. **Aim** – the state education goal, standard, and outcomes addressed; the district goal addressed; whether the objective is new or continuing; and whether the school is requesting a waiver to state or district requirements to implement the objective
  2. **Goal** – the written school improvement objective
  3. **Leadership** – the person(s) responsible for managing the objective
  4. **Information Systems** – the answer to the question, “Why are you addressing this objective?” using specific needs assessment data
  5. **Processes** – the answer to the question, “What processes will you put in place to accomplish this objective?” providing an overview of implementation strategies
  6. **Human Resource Development** – the answer to the question, “What training will be provided (and for whom) in order to accomplish this objective?”
  7. **Measures and Results** – the answer to the questions, “If this objective is to end at the conclusion of the 1997-98 school year, how will you know you have successfully completed the objective (your evaluation criteria)?” or, “If the objective extends beyond the 1997-98 school year, how will you know you have made adequate progress at the end of the 1997-98 school year?”
  8. **Action Plan** – (in a table format) by action step, the person responsible for implementation, resources needed, target date, evidence of completion, and date completed. (The last two items are to be entered when the action step is completed.)

Source: Manatee County School District

We reviewed a sample of 13 of the district’s 37 school improvement plans for 1997-98. The sample contained a proportional representation of elementary, middle, and high schools and included the district’s technical institute (postsecondary vocational school). All plans we reviewed were based on the individual school’s needs, 10 contained measurable

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2 The Manatee County School District operated 38 schools during the 1997-98 school year. The school improvement plan for Haile Middle School is not included in our analysis because the school opened in 1997-98 and was not required to develop a plan.
objectives, and 11 contained clear implementation strategies. Exhibit 4-14 presents a summary of OPPAGA’s findings regarding Manatee County School Improvement Plans.

**Exhibit 4-14**

**Manatee County School District**

**School Improvement Plans Are of High Quality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Plans</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Based on needs?</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contains measurable objectives?</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contains clear strategies?</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Plans Are Based on School Needs**

Each school advisory council analyzes needs assessment data and determines which state education goals are of highest priority for the school to address by including improvement objectives in its plan. This information is presented in a summary table in the front of each school improvement plan. In addition, school improvement plans specify the needs assessment data that lead the school to include each improvement objective in their plan.

**Plans Generally Contain Measurable Objectives**

The plans reviewed contained over 70 school improvement objectives. Overall, school improvement objectives are well written and define educational jargon, describe desired results and outcomes that are measurable, and contain timelines and benchmarks. However, some objectives, particularly those for the high schools and the technical institute, could be improved by better specifying what improvement is desired and by how much. For example, objectives that describe activities such as “develop and implement a policy addressing all forms of harassment” may cause someone not familiar with the plan, such as parents and community members, to be confused about what specifically the school is trying to improve, by how much, and by when. In some cases, additional information is available in other sections of the plan that clarifies the objective, but this information easily could be overlooked. In this example, for instance, the evaluation plans indicate that the school desires to reduce harassment and related offenses by 5% for the 1997-98 school year, which is the school’s actual objective.

**Plans Generally Contain Clear Implementation Strategies**

Overall, implementation strategies logically connect to objectives and are clearly described, someone is assigned responsibility to ensure strategy implementation, and timelines are established for the completion of each strategy. However, some schools could strengthen implementation strategies by taking the actions discussed below.

- Describe strategies in sufficient detail so that someone not involved in writing the plan can understand what actions the school will implement to achieve the objective. For example, “student parking permits,” “National Vocational Honor Society,” and “extend the Kaleidoscope Curriculum” do not provide an outsider, such as a parent or community member, or a new school advisory member, sufficient information to understand what needs to be done.
• By strategy, identify the specific materials, equipment, etc., needed for implementation; the cost of these materials; and the source of these funds. This will help ensure that implementation strategies are realistic and will help the school identify early on what may need to be done to raise additional funds through grants or special events.

School Advisory Councils
Generally Include Required Stakeholder Groups

School advisory councils (SACs) assist schools in preparing and evaluating school improvement plans. State law requires that each SAC include members representing the following stakeholder groups:

• principals,
• education support employees,
• teachers,
• parents,
• business and community citizens, and
• students (only area technical centers and high school advisory councils).

OPPAGA reviewed the membership lists of the district’s 38 school advisory councils to determine whether they include members representing stakeholder groups required by state law. We found that 1997-98 school advisory councils, which ranged in size from 9 to 61 members, generally included groups required by state law. However, four SACs did not; two SACs did not include education support employees, a third did not include business/community citizens, and a fourth did not include teachers. The variety of groups specified for SAC membership helps provide an appropriately balanced and broad-based approach to school improvement and ensures that a link exists between schools and the local community. (For a breakdown of the membership of each SAC, refer to Exhibit 4-15.)

Exhibit 4-15
Four 1997-98 School Advisory Councils
Do Not Include Required Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type School</th>
<th>Total Members</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Education Support Employees</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Business and Community</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Manatee County School District
Some Councils May Be Dominated by School Employees

Florida law also requires that a majority of members of each 1997-98 school advisory council be persons who are not employed by the school board.3 While Manatee County School District administrators could identify 1997-98 SAC members by category (teachers, parents, business/community representative, etc.), they could not identify which members are school board employees. OPPAGA previously has found that school boards also may employ members representing parents or other non-school related stakeholder groups. Therefore, this information is needed to determine compliance with Florida law. However, to approximate the proportion of school board employees on 1997-98 SACs, we compared the number of administrators, teachers, and support staff to the total number of SAC members for each school. We found that administrators, teachers, and support staff comprise the majority of the SAC membership at two of the district’s 38 schools. In addition, the number of administrators, teachers and support staff equals that of other members on a third school advisory council. Thus, the district may not be in compliance with Florida law regarding the composition of its 1997-98 school advisory councils.

Starting in the 1998-99 school year, the Florida Department of Education will not release funds from the Educational Enhancement Trust Fund (lottery funds) to school districts not complying with SAC membership composition requirements, including that a majority of members not be school employees. Thus, if the district does not comply with these requirements, it could lose $2.7 million in lottery funds in 1998-99. To ensure compliance, the district plans to collect employer data for future school advisory councils.

Recommendation

- The district generally meets the best practice of ensuring that school improvement plans effectively translate identified needs into activities with measurable objectives. However, school advisory councils do not always contain those members specified by state law. To ensure compliance, the district plans to collect employer data for future school advisory councils. We recommend that the district implement these plans and establish other mechanisms to ensure that all school advisory councils include required members so the councils act as an effective link between schools and the local community. This can be implemented with existing resources.

Has the Manatee County School District established and implemented strategies to continually assess the reliability of its data?

Yes, the district has controls in place to assess the reliability of its data. However, the district lacks adequate procedures to ensure that data is generally accurate and meets the needs of management.

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3 The 1998 Florida Legislature amended state law to require that a majority of school advisory council members must be persons who are not employed by the school.
The district has in place strategies to assess the reliability of its management information systems. However, procedures are needed to better ensure the accuracy of data throughout the district. Improvements in data accuracy and enhancements to the management information systems should improve the utility of information for administrators. Because computer-processed data are an integral part of the decision-making process, it is crucial that data are relevant and reliable. Data reliability exists when data are sufficiently complete and error free to be convincing for their purpose and context. It is a relative concept that recognizes that data may contain errors as long as they are not of a magnitude that would cause a reasonable person, aware of the errors, to doubt a finding or conclusion based on the data. (Further discussion of data is included on pages 3-37 and 12-20.)

**The District Tests Data Reliability**

The district has in place edit checks to

- determine if the data entered matches the accepted or expected values of the data element;
- determine if an inappropriate relationship exists between data elements; and
- identify data that may or may not be inaccurate but needs further checking.

This was illustrated through Information Services reports regarding the Exceptional Student Program. The district uses a number of reports to help ensure the reliability of all management information. In addition, the district subjects all data to online edit reports as provided by the Department of Education (DOE). These reports specify when errors exist within the data, prior to the district completing the information surveys that are forwarded to DOE. Districts forward data to DOE at specific times of the year in the form of informational surveys.

**The District Relies on Edit Checks to Identify Data Errors**

The district uses computer software to help ensure data reliability. This includes items such as validation reports that search for obvious errors within a specific database. This was illustrated by Information Service’s use of the *Exceptional Student Verification Report*. District staff provided a variety of examples of reports run against the Exceptional Student Educational Program’s (ESE) database that help to ensure reliability.

The district also uses a lengthy data verification process that precedes the transmission of survey data to the DOE. This begins with the district conducting a tentative survey of information reported by the schools. Changes are made by district staff to correct any errors. The official data survey process begins as the district captures a subset of information and subjects this subset to online edit reports. Reports summarizing data errors are sent to the schools for their review. Once the school has made the proper updates to the data (so that the data passes the initial edit checks), it is forwarded to the central office. The district then transmits this information to DOE. This process takes about three weeks to complete and is conducted several times during the year, before any information is transmitted to DOE.

Both the use of computer software and this data verification process offer some level of security regarding the reliability of this information. According to DOE staff responsible for uploading data from the district informational surveys, Manatee County School District is very conscientious about providing good data. In addition, they are not aware of any obvious problems with the district’s data quality or integrity.
The District Cannot Demonstrate Data Is Accurate

Because the district does not have adequate data entry procedures in place, it cannot be sure that data is accurate. The district relies on its internal controls over its data processes to ensure data reliability and accuracy. However, the district lacks the internal controls governing the entry of student data at the respective schools and the verification of the data once it has been entered against original information. Without the proper internal controls, the district may be jeopardizing the accuracy of its data. Presently, there is not a consistent set of procedures in place for schools to follow regarding how hard copies of information should be stored after entry or supervisory checks of entered information. In addition, there are no procedures governing the personnel responsible for entering data.

Accountability for the information entered at each school lies with each school principal. The result is a high level of variance in the documentation kept at each school, level of supervisory checks conducted, personnel authorized to enter data, and procedures in place on how data is entered at each school. These types of variances do not ensure that accurate data is entered at school sites and is consistent across schools. The Auditor General has not made recommendations in its recent compliance reports pertaining to data accuracy and reporting. However, these reports generally do not include a review of school data entry processes.

District Staff May Use Inaccurate and Unreliable Data to Manage Programs

When data needed to manage programs is not available in the districtwide database, administrators use information in databases developed by individual program staff. Information in these isolated databases is not submitted to the Department of Education and is not tested for errors. Thus, this data has high potential to be inaccurate and unreliable. (For more information on data used to manage programs, refer to page 3-37.)

Recommendations

- The district generally meets the best practice of establishing and implementing strategies to continually assess the reliability of its data. However, the district lacks adequate procedures to ensure that data is generally accurate and meets the needs of management.
- We recommend that the district establish formal guidelines regarding the consistent storage of hard copy information at school sites.
- In addition, we recommend that the district develop guidelines to check the accuracy of data in its database. To be cost efficient, this may require that the district first conduct a risk-based assessment or other sampling method to identify data most prone to error. Then the district should focus its data checks on this data. Data checks may include comparing hard copy information against information in the district’s database.
- We also recommend the district establish formal guidelines specifying the position(s) responsible for data entry at school sites and its duties.
- These recommendations can be implemented with existing resources.