1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Section 11.515, Florida Statutes, was created by the 1996 Florida Legislature for the purpose of conducting performance reviews of school districts in Florida. The statute provides that the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) contract with private firms to conduct performance reviews of identified school districts. As stated in the bill which called for the creation of this statute:

*Public officials and citizens need to know if government funds are handled with the highest level of efficiency and productivity to ensure a quality education for students....*

The bill also stated that:

*School Board members and Superintendents can benefit from an objective and professional review of their school district's management and performance.*

The purpose of the Florida school district performance review is to identify ways that a designated school district can:

- save funds;
- improve management; and
- increase efficiency and effectiveness.

On December 12, 1996, (OPPAGA) contracted with MGT of America, Inc. to conduct a performance review of the Hamilton County School District.

The entire review process was completed in a five-month time period. The major activities were scheduled and accomplished as displayed in Exhibit 1-1. Throughout the project, every effort was made to minimize disruptions to schools and to the central office.

In the methodology section that follows, the report describes the various mechanisms that were used to maximize community and employee involvement in the initial phase of the performance review.
### EXHIBIT 1-1
**HAMILTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT PERFORMANCE REVIEW**
**MAJOR ACTIVITIES BY MONTH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>MAJOR ACTIVITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| December 1996 | - Signed contract between MGT and OPPAGA with consent of Joint Legislative Committee.  
               - Conducted initial meetings between MGT and officials of Hamilton County and OPPAGA.  
               - Designed interview and focus group instruments.  
               - Obtained and analyzed existing reports and materials on Hamilton County obtained from the district and state.  
               - Developed profiles of the district.  
               - Designed surveys for use with Hamilton County district administrators, principals, and teachers. |
| January 1997  | - Conducted surveys of central office administrators, principals, and teachers.                                                                |
| February 1997 | - Conducted diagnostic review (Week of Feb. 3).  
               - Held public hearing (CHARRETTE).  
               - Conducted interviews and summarized findings from interviews with School Board members, senior administrators, and community leaders, and focus group sessions with selected groups.  
               - Tailored guidelines for the performance review to reflect unique local conditions as well as public and employee input and concerns in Hamilton County.  
               - Conducted in-depth on-site review (Week of Feb. 24).  
               - Visited schools.                                                                 |
| March 1997    | - Collected and analyzed additional information as needed.                                                                                   |
|              | - Made preliminary presentation in the district to OPPAGA and Hamilton County senior staff.                                                 |
|              | - Developed draft report.                                                                                                                   |
| April 1997    | - Submitted draft report.                                                                                                                   |
|              | - Conducted meetings with OPPAGA and district representatives.                                                                                |
| May 1997      | - Prepared final report.                                                                                                                   |
|              | - Presented final report to school board.                                                                                                   |
|              | - Distributed final report to the public.                                                                                                  |
Appreciation is expressed to members of the Hamilton County School Board, Superintendent Pat Parks, and school district employees, students and community residents who provided information during the preparation for, and implementation of, on-site activities. Special appreciation is expressed to Mr. Ron Hobbs (who was assigned by the Superintendent as liaison with MGT for the review) for providing office space, equipment, meeting room facilities, and helpful staff to accommodate the on-site needs.

1.2 Methodology

Stakeholder Involvement

During the week of February 3rd, on-site interviews were conducted in the Hamilton County School District. Interview participants consisted of business leaders, chairpersons and members of various advisory committees, parents, and concerned citizens. The public hearing or CHARRETTE was conducted February 4, 1997 at Central Hamilton Middle School from 4:00 to 9:00 p.m. A total of 15 community representatives participated. The results of the public hearing are shown in Exhibit 1-2.

A total of 79 Hamilton County stakeholders were interviewed for the public input phase of the Performance Review. Stakeholders were interviewed individually or in focus groups on February 3rd, 4th and 5th; some additional stakeholders were interviewed during the week of February 24th. Fourteen individuals were interviewed individually and 65 were interviewed in focus groups. Members of the School Improvement Teams from all schools were interviewed.

Stakeholders include all persons who were identified either by school district administrators or by referrals form other stakeholders in the community. Selection and referral criteria for the interviews were based on knowledge and/or interest in the district such as community leaders, parents, business persons, PTA members, teachers, members of civic organizations, retired citizens and citizens who previously had children in public schools.

Employee Surveys

To secure the initial involvement of central office administrators, school principals, and teachers in helping to determine the scope of the performance review, individual surveys were conducted. Surveys provided administrators and teachers the opportunity to express their opinions on the way the school district was operating and to recommend opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

The written surveys provided statistically reliable information on the perceptions and opinions of school-based and non-school-based administrators as well as teachers, and the surveys allowed the review team to determine how the opinions and perceptions of central office administrators, school administrators, teachers, and the community differed. In addition, the survey responses of Hamilton County employees were contrasted with the survey responses obtained in previous performance reviews to provide benchmark comparisons with employees in other school systems across the country. The survey results and comparisons are included in Chapter 3 with instruments and survey results in Appendices A and B.
Diagnostic Review

The results of the surveys and focus groups were used to ensure that major issues of concern were addressed during the performance review. Additionally, requests from individuals and groups who wanted to provide information either during the on-site phase of the project or by telephone were accommodated. Concerned citizens who were aware of the review expressed their opinions about various aspects of performance within the Hamilton County School District. Common issues were then incorporated into the scope of the performance review.

In-Depth On-Site Review

During the week of February 24, 1997, a total of six members from the MGT project team were involved in on-site work. These individuals were organized into specialized teams that examined components of the following 11 systems as defined in the project work plan:

- School District Organization and Management
- Educational Service Delivery and Performance Measures
- Personnel Management
- Community Involvement
- Facilities Use and Management
- Asset and Risk Management
- Financial Management
- Purchasing and Warehouse Services
- Food Service
- Transportation
- Safety and Security

In addition, MGT analyzed both instructional and administrative technology within the district.

The systematic assessment of the district was aided by MGT’s Guidelines for Conducting Management and Performance Audits of School Districts. Following the collection and analysis of existing data, and new information from community input and surveys, guidelines were developed to reflect local rules and regulations, the unique conditions of Hamilton County School District, and the input of local residents, community leaders, central office administrators, principals, teachers, and students.

The on-site review included meetings with most district-level and school-level staff, and the subsequent review of data and documentation provided by these individuals. Members of the review team conducted formal visits in each of the district’s schools.

On-site visits incorporated information from principals, teachers and other staff involved with the various components of the 12 district operations that were identified above. More than 50 campus-level employees were interviewed by one of the six members of the review team during this time.
EXHIBIT 1-2
SUMMARY OF PUBLIC HEARING (CHARRETTE)

The format for the CHARRETTE was to provide newsprint on the cafeteria walls which was used for comments of a specific issue or functional area being addressed in the performance review. The summary below shows the areas that received comments. Please note that not all areas covered in the review received comments. Also note that these comments reflect perceptions expressed by a very small segment of the community. The perceptions may not agree with the true situation.

**Governance and Administration**
- Some personnel receive raises and bonuses based on preferential treatment by the board and administration.
- School board is unresponsive to questions and problems raised by teaching staff.
- Too much is being spent on administrators’ salaries and for out-of-town trips by the board administration.
- The information learned at out-of-town conferences and workshops is not shared with non-attending staff.
- The school board will not make difficult decisions and they seem to respond to politically sensitive issues only.
- Teachers who complain or “buck the system” are sent to teach at the Juvenile detention facility.

**Personnel**
- The district institutionalizes grant staff and programs after the grant has terminated.
- Teachers need more support and direction from their principals.
- Non-instructional personnel should receive more benefits.
- Salaries for some personnel are too high.

**Facilities**
- The high school received an unnecessary and superficial renovation of its facade.
- Capital improvement funds might be used for non-authorized expenses.
- Many books were damaged after heavy rains collapsed the high school roof during a roof replacement job.

**Instructional Services**
- Students need to be tested in lower grades on reading and math levels. Many of the students in Hamilton County Schools are not reading at their corresponding grade levels.
- Better vocational training is needed at the middle and high schools.
- Higher academic standards are needed.
- School nursing services are excellent.
- Guidance counselors are very helpful and responsive to student and parents.
- The district should pay more attention to academics than sports.
EXHIBIT 1-2 (Continued)
SUMMARY OF PUBLIC HEARING (CHARRETTE)

Instructional Services  (Continued)

- The Alternative Education Center is not functioning properly.
- Many parents pull their children out of Hamilton County Schools and enroll them in private schools in neighboring districts.

Purchasing

- There are not enough textbooks at all schools.
- Purchasing practices are not providing the best use of taxpayer dollars.

Safety and Security

- Students are beaten and threatened by other students.
- Too many accidents are occurring on the playground at South Hamilton Elementary.
- Discipline is not being handled equitably by the schools and is a major problem on the buses.

EXHIBIT 1-3
STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED DURING THE PUBLIC INPUT PHASE, INDIVIDUALLY OR IN FOCUS GROUPS, FEBRUARY 3-5 AND WEEK OF FEBRUARY 24, 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS</th>
<th>FOCUS GROUPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REPRESENTATIVE GROUP</td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Volunteers (non-parents)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents (not as part of a SIT or PTO group)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Civic Leaders (non-parents)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Leaders (non-parents)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL PERSONS INTERVIEWED = 79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.3 Overview of the Hamilton County School District

Schools and Students

With an estimated 1995 population of just 11,773, Hamilton County is one of the smallest counties in Florida, ranking 60th out of 67. The county’s growth rate from 1990 to 1995 of 7.7 percent was lower than the state growth rate of 9.5 percent. The Florida Department of Commerce projections indicate that Hamilton County’s growth rate will continue to lag behind that of Florida; between 1992 and 2010, Florida is expected to grow 33.86 percent and Hamilton County is expected to grow just 8.77 percent.

Hamilton County has a relatively young and diverse population. Forty (40) percent of its residents are nonwhite, the fourth highest percentage in the state. The state’s total nonwhite percentage was 15.46 percent. Retail Trade and Services are the industries that employ the largest numbers of Hamilton County residents. Hamilton County’s 1992 unemployment rate was 13.2 percent, which was lower only than the rates in the counties of Hardee, St. Lucie, and Hendry. The 1992 unemployment rate for the state as a whole was 8.2 percent. Based on 1990 census data, the percentage of persons 25 years old and over without a high school diploma was 41.6 percent, the percentage with a high school diploma (or equivalency) was 37.7, while 20.6 percent attended at least some college.

The Department of Education Public School Membership Data for Fall 1996 show the Hamilton County School District with a student population of 2,336 students and 59th in the state in size. With just 279 full-time staff, the district is one of the smallest in the state.

Hamilton County School District has shown slow growth in student enrollment over the past several years (see Exhibit 1-4). As can be seen, in 1986-1987, non-white, (primarily Black non-Hispanic) students comprised 50 percent of the population. In 1995-1996, nonwhites comprised 54 percent. This indicates a slightly higher growth rate among the nonwhite student population in the district.
EXHIBIT 1-4
HAMILTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
STUDENT ENROLLMENT TRENDS


Exhibit 1-5 provides information on the trends in the percentage of students in the upper and lower quartiles on the Grade Ten Assessment Test (GTAT) in both reading comprehension and mathematics. The percentage of students scoring in the lower quartile in mathematics has decreased from 1991-92 to 1992-93, and then increased in 1993-94, and again decreased in 1994-95. The percentage of students in the lower quartile in mathematics increased by one percent from 1994-95 to 1995-96. The percentage of students scoring in the lower quartile on reading comprehension increased from 1991-92 to 1992-93, then decreased in 1993-94, and increased again in 1994-95.

The percentage of students scoring in the lower quartile for reading comprehension remained the same from 1994-95 to 1995-96. The percentage of students scoring in the upper quartile in reading comprehension increased from 1991-92 to 1993-94, and then decreased below the 1991-92 percentage in 1994-95. The scores increased again in 1995-96, but did not reach the 1993-94 level.

The percentage of students scoring in the upper quartile in mathematics has also fluctuated. Between 1991-92 and 1992-93 the percentage increased, but then decreased in 1993-94, the percentage increased from 1993-94 to 1995-96. For the 1995-96 school year, Hamilton County School District ranked in the 31st median
national percentile on the GTAT reading portion and in the 30th percentile on the mathematics portion.

**EXHIBIT 1-5**

**HAMILTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**TRENDS IN PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IN UPPER AND LOWER QUARTILES GRADE TEN ASSESSMENT TEST**

Another indicator of student achievement is the percentage of students who enter college or technical school upon graduation. Exhibit 1-6 provides this information for the district for the past decade. As the exhibit shows, the percentage of students entering college has fluctuated, but generally increased since 1986-87. In 1995-96, the percentage of students entering college was 61.76 percent. The percentage of students entering technical school has been small and has never been over 6.9 percent. The percentage of students entering technical school in 1995-96 was 3.7 percent.
EXHIBIT 1-6
HAMILTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
TRENDS IN PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS
ENTERING COLLEGE AND TECHNICAL SCHOOL
1986-87 THROUGH 1995-96

Note: Some data not available for 1986-87 through 1988-89.

Staff

Exhibit 1-7 provides the number of classroom teachers and total instructional staff per 1,000 students over time. The exhibit shows that the number of instructional staff per 1,000 students remained about the same between 1986-87 and 1987-88. The number then jumped significantly between 1987-88 and 1988-89. The number of instructional staff per 1,000 students then began a gradual increase, although fluctuating some, until 1995-96. The number of instructional staff per 1,000 students in 1995-96 was 71.8. As the exhibit shows, the number of classroom teachers per 1,000 students also increased significantly between 1987-88 and 1988-89. From 1988-89 to 1995-1996, the number of classroom teachers per 1,000 students has remained relatively stable. In 1995-96, there were 62.7 classroom teachers per 1,000 students.
Revenue and Expenditures

Exhibit 1-8 shows revenue trends. As can be seen, the Hamilton County School District’s sources of revenue changed slightly between 1994-95 and 1995-96. The amount of federal and local funding decreased. Federal funding decreased from four percent to three percent, while local funding decreased from 28 percent to 26 percent. However, the amount of state funding has increased from 68 percent to 71 percent.
EXHIBIT 1-8
HAMILTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
REVENUE SOURCES

1994-95

Federal 4%
Local 28%
State 68%

1995-96

Federal 3%
Local 26%
State 71%

Exhibit 1-9 provides information on average teacher salaries for the past 10 years. As can be seen, average teacher salaries have fluctuated at about the same rates throughout the decade shown. Average salaries decreased between 1994-95 and 1995-96 for all degree types and were about the same as average salaries in 1993-94.

EXHIBIT 1-9
HAMILTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
TRENDS IN TEACHER SALARIES