

A Statewide Network Promoting
College Readiness, Access and
Success

POLICY RESEARCH BRIEF



research • communication • advocacy • support

Leadership Team

Gloria Laureano, UCF
glaurean@mail.ucf.edu

Donna Parrino, USF
parrino@acad.usf.edu

Nancy Poulson, FAU
npoulson@fau.edu

Lidia Tuttle, FIU
tuttle@fiu.edu

Steve Nettles, FSU
nettles@coe.fsu.edu

Bernard Oliver, UF
boeliver@coe.ufl.edu

William E. Hudson, FSU
whudson@admin.fsu.edu

Cheryl A. Fountain, UNF
fountain@unf.edu

Executive Director
Paul Dosal, USF
pdosal@enlace.usf.edu

Assistant Director
Braulio Colón, USF
bcolon@enlace.usf.edu

ENLACE FLORIDA is a W.K.
Kellogg Foundation initiative
managed by the National
Council for Community and
Education Partnerships.

No More Business as Usual:

Florida Department of Education Launches Ambitious Effort to Turn Around Low-Performing Schools

On July 1, 2008, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings authorized Florida and six other states to participate in a new “differentiated accountability” system that aligns each state’s school grading system with federal requirements under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Although Florida and the U.S. Department of Education both use FCAT scores to measure a schools’ academic performance, Florida assigns a letter grade of A to F, while the federal government simply determines whether a school is making adequate yearly progress (AYP) or not. These different accountability systems generate different results of academic performance. In fact, some schools earning an “A” under Florida’s system have not made AYP. Moreover, NCLB imposes different consequences than the state on under-performing schools, ultimately requiring nearly 450 Florida schools to take corrective actions.

Florida’s participation in the differentiated accountability system, supported by Florida’s entire congressional delegation, will allow the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) to provide specialized assistance to the state’s neediest schools. The details of Florida’s new accountability system, spelled out in a memorandum from Florida Commissioner of Education Eric Smith to district superintendents on July 29, 2008, reveal a more nuanced approach to accountability that could make Florida a national leader in efforts to evaluate and improve school performance. The new guidelines place Florida schools into one of five categories, based on a combination of Florida’s A+ school grading system and AYP measures, creating a more distinguishing approach to evaluating schools and taking appropriate action to improve school performance.

Under the new system, 1,081 Florida schools were identified in need of some form of intervention, but only thirteen schools met the criteria that required immediate and dramatic forms of intervention. These “intervene” schools, as defined by the FDOE, have “failed to achieve AYP for five or more years in addition to demonstrating severe, long-standing reading and mathematics-based deficiencies. They require the most intensive intervention methods such as restructuring and closures.”¹ If these schools do not show significant progress in the upcoming school year, the schools may be shut down or shut down and re-opened as charter schools (under private or school district management).

The differentiated accountability system has been under fire since Secretary Spellings announced the initiative in March 2008, when the National School Boards Association derided it as “a day late and a dollar

¹ Dr. Eric J. Smith, Florida Commissioner of Education, to District Superintendents, July 29, 2008.

short.”² However, given that school districts were only required to respond to the state’s new accountability model by August 18, 2008, it may be too soon to predict either success or failure for the new system. In fact, ENLACE FLORIDA encourages districts, superintendents, school boards, principals, and teachers to work closely with Commissioner Smith to fine tune and implement this new policy designed to turn around low-performing schools. For the first time in the history of NCLB, the state is providing districts with a comprehensive package of interventions and support services designed to improve low-performing schools. Some support services highlighted in this package are not necessarily new, but the FDOE will now require school districts to include the measures in their school improvement plan, depending on their categorization in the new accountability model.

State Standards v. Federal Standards

In Florida, the key measurement tool used to assess student proficiency in reading, math, writing, and science is the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Student scores from this high-stakes test are used by both the state and federal government to assess overall school performance. The state assigns a letter grade based on student *progress* and *performance*. The federal government simply focuses on *performance* and assigns a “Yes” or a “No” to the question of: Did the school make adequate yearly progress (AYP)? Florida has been critical of this pass or fail approach under NCLB and has been encouraging the federal government to adopt an evaluation tool that allows the state to measure and reward schools for *progress* or learning gains.

Under NCLB, there are approximately thirty-seven criteria that must be met in order for a school to qualify as making AYP for any given year. For example, a school must reach a specific level of performance on FCAT in reading, math, and writing within its overall population and also within individual subgroups including White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, Economically Disadvantaged, Limited English Proficient, and Students with Disabilities. If just one subgroup fails to meet the standards, the entire school fails to make AYP requiring certain interventions to be initiated after two years of missing the mark.

Going beyond measuring benchmarks, the state accountability system also assesses the progress of individual students. Florida’s accountability system gives credit to schools for improvements among the lowest performing students. Given these differences in both accountability systems, many schools end up receiving an “A” from the state while failing to meet AYP under NCLB. The Differentiated Accountability Program is the first substantive attempt to get both state and federal laws to support each other.

Profile of the 13 Intervene Schools

The Differentiated Accountability Plan allows the state to target its efforts and resources on the neediest schools. The state of Florida determined that the neediest schools were those that:

- Earned an “F” or “D” in 2008 school grade calculation or earned two “F” grades in a four year period **AND**

Met three out of four of the following criteria:

- The percentage of non-proficient students in reading has stayed the same or decreased
- The percentage of non-proficient students in math has stayed the same or decreased
- 65% or more of the school’s students are non-proficient in reading
- 65% or more of the school’s students are non-proficient in math ³

Thirteen schools met these criteria and were placed by the FDOE in the “Intervene” category (Table 1). Among these there are 5 elemen-

² “Good for the goose, but not the gander?,” National School Boards Association, March 18, 2008, <http://boardbuzz.nsba.org/archives/025387.php>

³ Florida Department of Education, : http://www.fdoe.org/news/2008/2008_07_29/diffaccountimplem.pdf

tary schools, 4 middle schools, 3 high schools and 1 combination school.

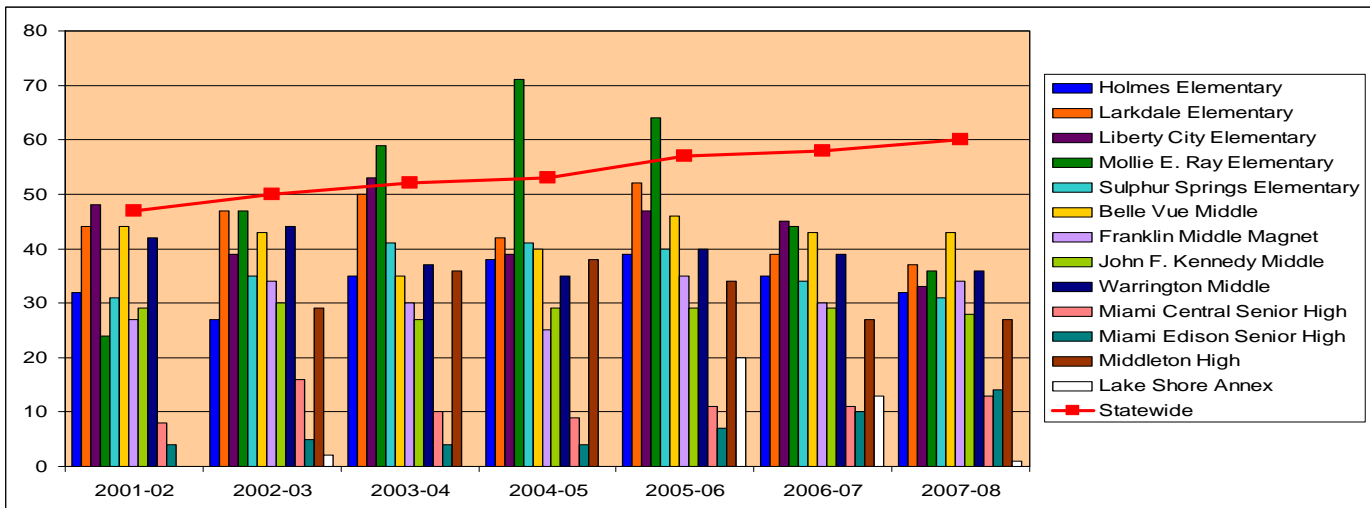
| District | School Name |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| Broward | Larkdale Elementary School |
| Dade | Holmes Elementary School |
| Dade | Liberty City Elementary School |
| Dade | Miami Central Senior High School |
| Dade | Miami Edison Senior High School |
| Escambia | Warrington Middle School |
| Hillsborough | Franklin Middle Magnet School |
| Hillsborough | Middleton High School |
| Hillsborough | Sulphur Springs Elementary School |
| Leon | Belle Vue Middle School |
| Orange | Mollie E Ray Elementary School |
| Palm Beach | John F. Kennedy Middle School |
| Palm Beach | Lake Shore Annex |

In the 2007-08 school year, a total of 10,494 students attended these schools, most of which are located in high-poverty neighborhoods. All thirteen schools had minority enrollments exceeding 60%; nine of the intervene schools had minority enrollments exceeding 90%.

ENLACE FLORIDA carefully examined the student academic performance of the 13 schools over the last six years. Our research indicates that these schools are indeed in danger of failing too many of their students. More than half of the students at these schools failed to meet the Sunshine State Standards in Reading and Math.

Figure 1 presents the percentage of students who met state reading standards by scoring a three or higher in the reading portion of the FCAT. The vast majority of the schools performed below the state average for each year analyzed. Of greater concern is the fact that the scores obtained by these schools have remained relatively constant or have declined since 2001. During this period, three of the Intervene schools never reached the 20% level for student attainment of reading standards in this period. In the most recent school year, the highest percentage of students attaining reading standards at any one of these schools was 43%. The lowest number was 1%. Across the state 60% of students meet reading standards.

Figure 1: Percent of Students Meeting Reading Standards



Source: NCLB School Public Accountability Report, URL: <http://doeweb-prd.doe.state.fl.us/eds/nclbspar/index.cfm>; FCAT Reading by Achievement Level Grades 3-10, URL: http://fcattldoe.org/mediapacket/2008/pdf/08pressPacketGR4_10_ReadingGraphs.pdf

The Math scores at these schools are slightly better than the Readings scores, but a similar pattern of underperformance emerges (Figure 2). Over the seven years analyzed, some schools made gains in Math that were later lost. In 2007-8, the highest percentage of students meeting Math standards at any one of the Intervene schools was 57%, approximating the state average of 66%. The lowest rate was 11%.

Figure 2: Percent of Students Meeting Math Standards

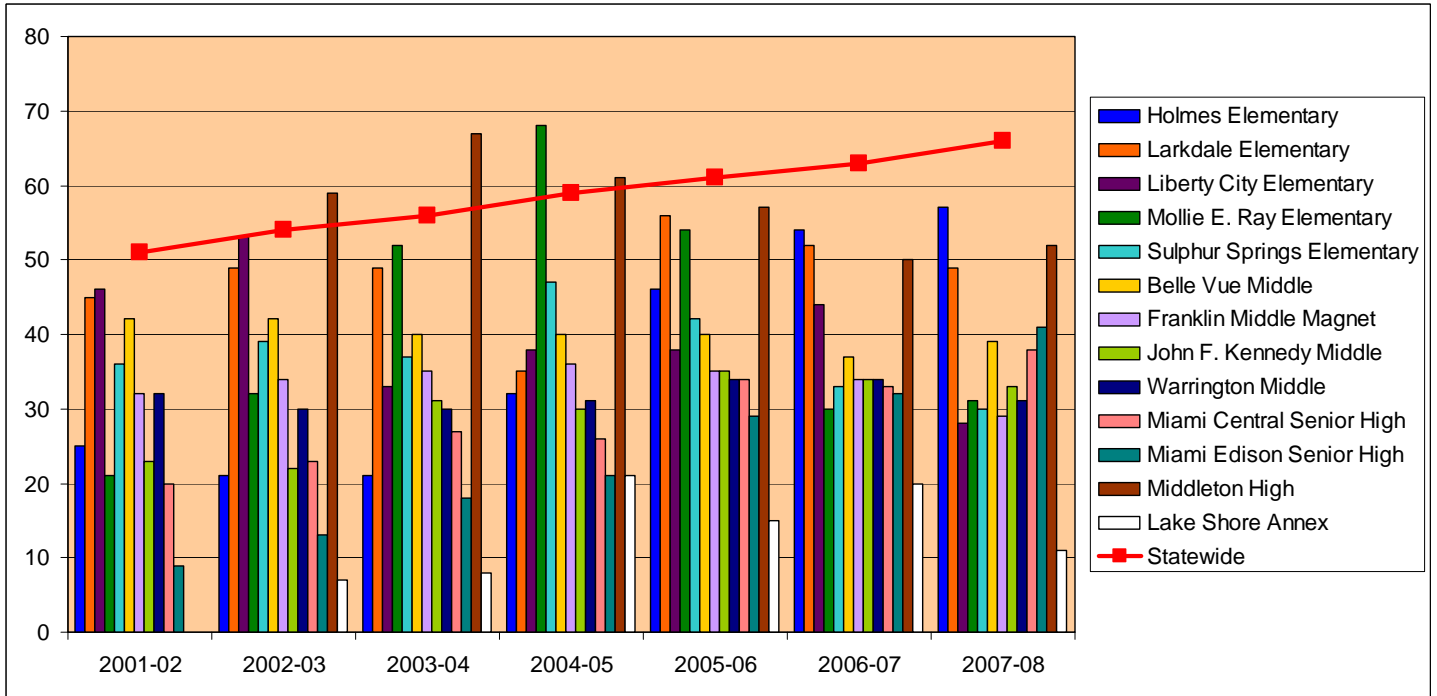


Figure 3: Percent of Students Who Graduated Within 4 Years of Entry into 9th Grade

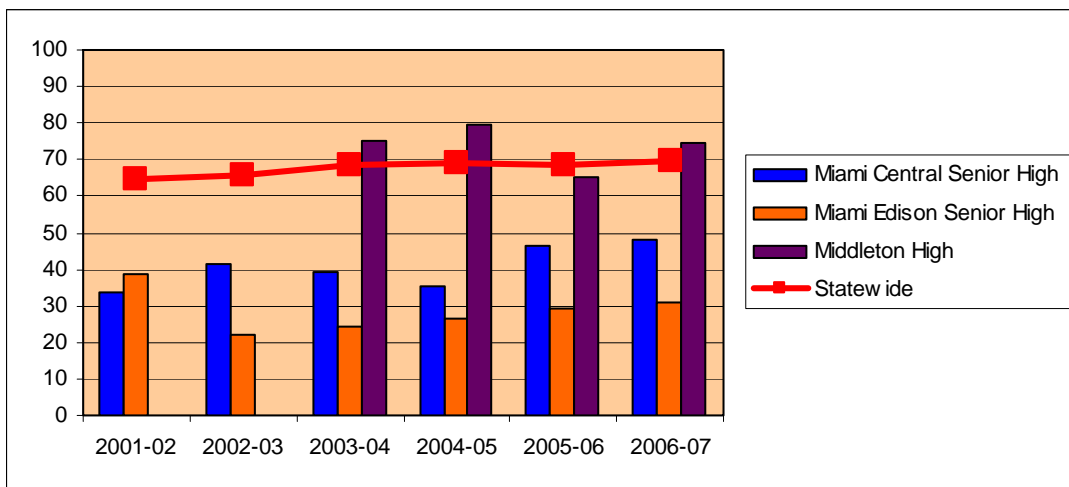


Figure 4: Percent of African American Students Who Graduated Within 4 Years of Entry into 9th Grade

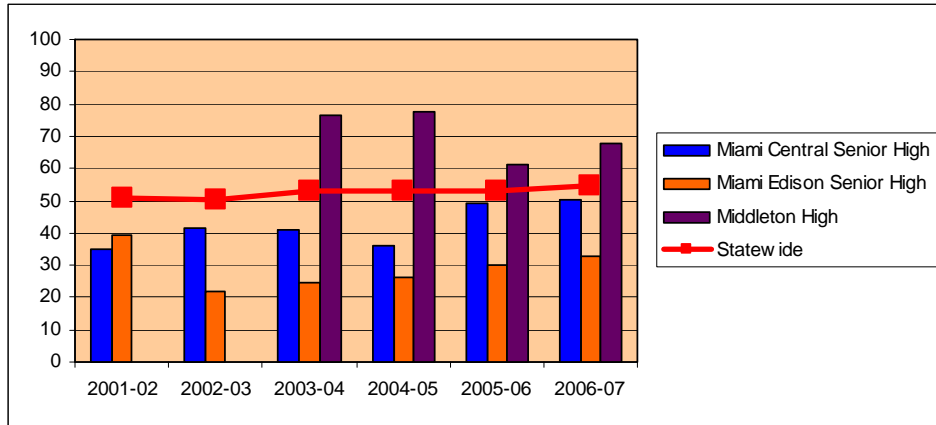
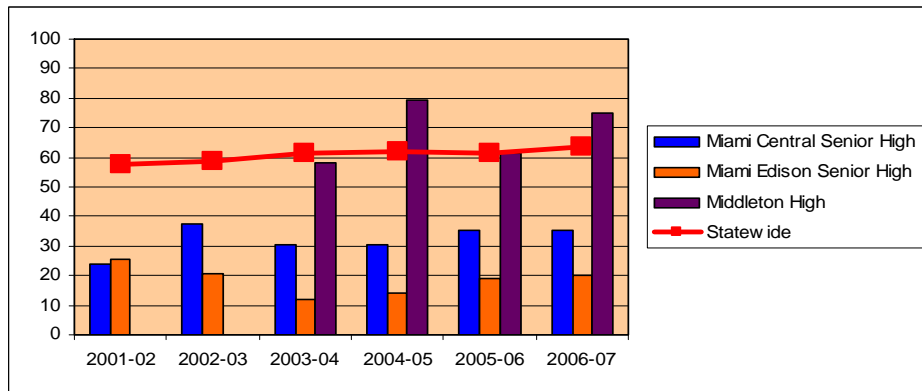
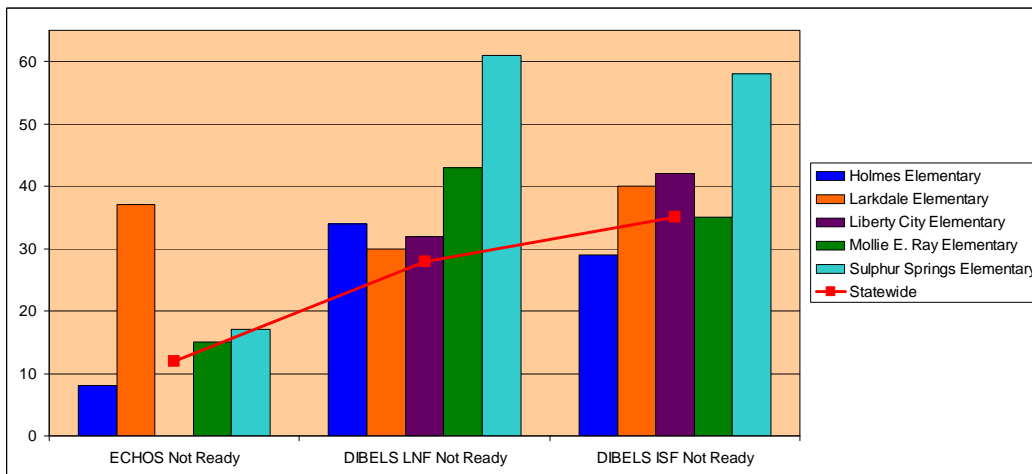


Figure 5: Percent of Hispanic Students Who Graduated Within 4 Years of Entry into 9th Grade



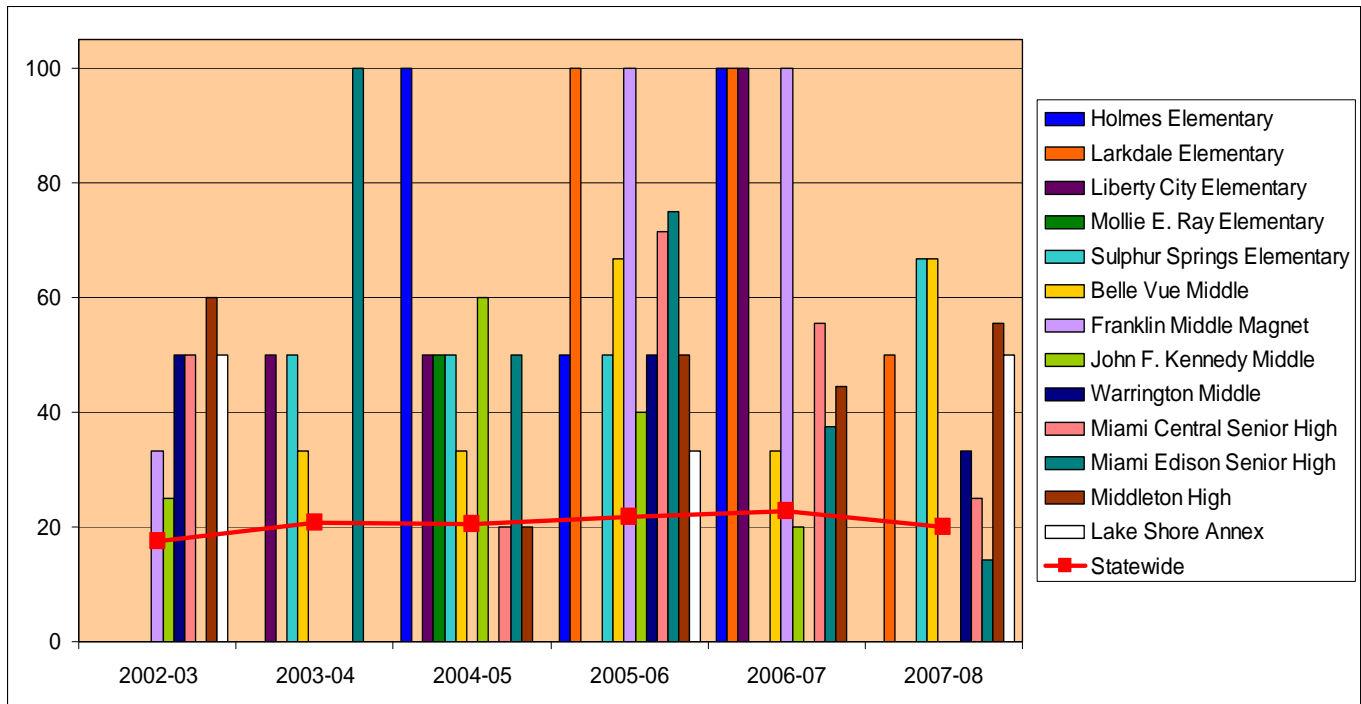
The five elementary schools in the intervene category have faced challenges from students who are not prepared to begin school. Kindergarten students are screened in their first 30 calendar days in school. The screening includes observations of the skills, knowledge and behaviors of the student (ECHOS) as well as probes of their Letter Naming Fluency (DIBELS LNF) and Initial Sound Fluency (DIBELS ISF). In 2007-08, these schools had a higher percentage of students labeled as “Not Ready” for school than the statewide rate, as illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Percent of Students Labeled “Not Ready” in the Kindergarten Readiness Scale



Another common characteristic of the 13 intervene schools is high turnover in instructional and administrative staff. Three of the schools in this group had two occasions in the last seven years in which there was a total turnover in school administration. Each one of the thirteen schools had at least one year in which 50% or more of the administrative staff was newly hired (see Figure 7). One of the schools actually had four such years. Only one change was due to an increase in staffing.

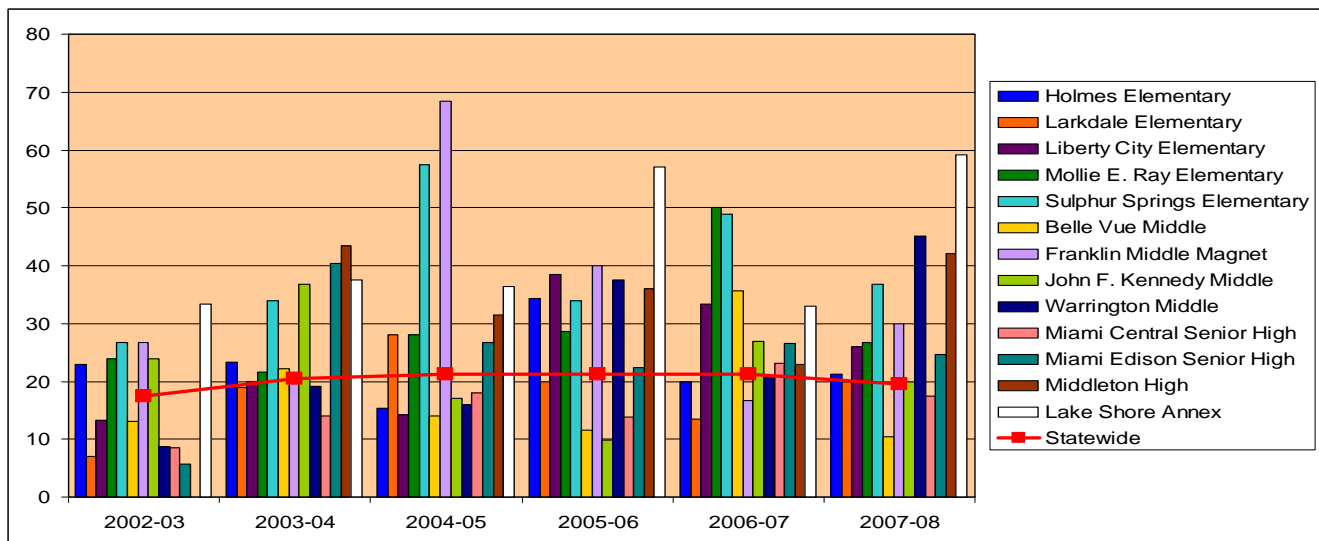
Figure 7: Percent of Newly Hired Administrators



Source for Figures 7, 8, and 9: NCLB School Public Accountability Report, URL: <http://doeweb-prd.doe.state.fl.us/eds/nclbspar/index.cfm>

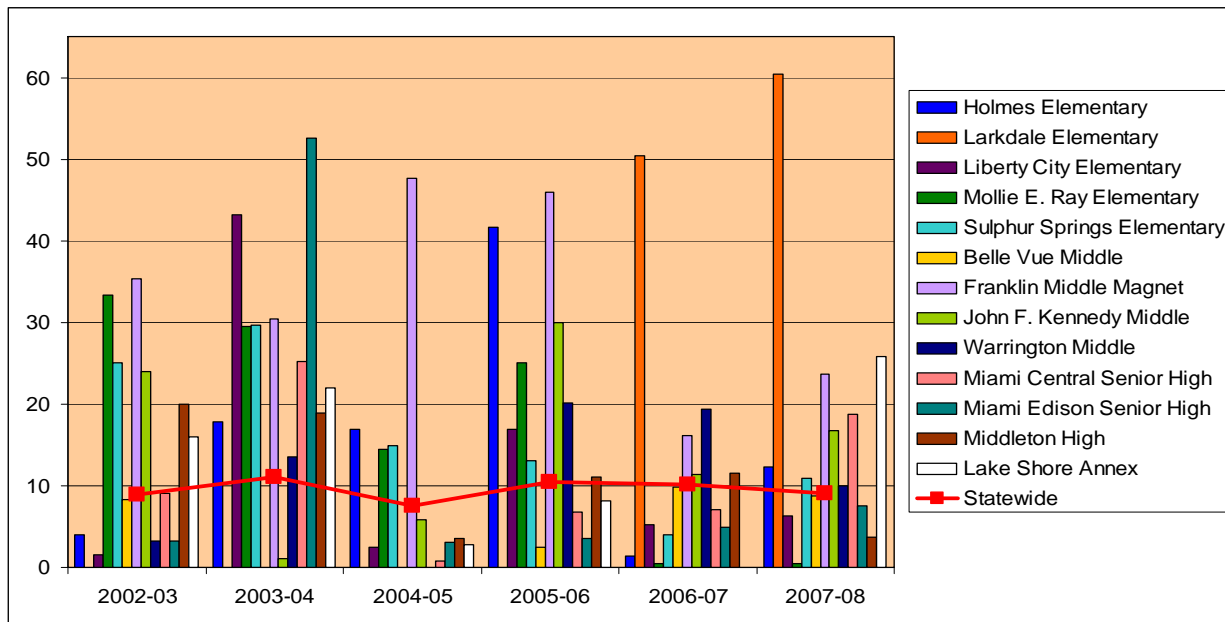
The 13 intervene schools have also registered turnover rates among instructional staff that were higher than the state average (see Figure 8). In each of the six years, 1 in every 5 teachers was teaching for the first time at that school. Some of these new teachers had experience teaching at other schools, but there were also new teachers who *began* their careers with the difficult task of teaching at-risk students in failing schools.

Figure 8: Percent of Newly Hired Teachers



These schools often had a high percentage of classes which were not taught by highly qualified teachers, as demonstrated in Figure 9. Over the six year period analyzed, 14.3% of all classes offered in these schools were not taught by highly qualified teachers. In one of these underperforming schools, 33% of the classes taught over a six year period were not taught by a highly qualified teacher.

Figure 9: Percent of Classes Not Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers



Lack of Stability in School Leadership

Effective and inspiring school leadership is one of several critical factors that can often contribute to a successful school turnaround. This is recognized by FDOE’s Differentiated Accountability Program, which requires school districts to recruit and assign principals that have a record of turning around a similar underperforming school. However, many “intervene” schools lack stability in school leadership, a critical component to sustained growth and achievement. Without attempting to demonstrate a causal relationship between school leadership and student academic performance, Figure 10 offers a simple comparison between Mollie E Ray Elementary School (Intervene School) with Rolling Hills Elementary. Both schools are located in Orange County and share similar demographics. However, Rolling Hills has had no turnover in school leadership since 2001, while Mollie E Ray has had to cope with two significant leadership changes within the last 4 years. Under the leadership of Principal Joy Taylor, Mollie E Ray improved from a school grade of “F” in 2001 to an “A” by 2004. The district then decided to assign an untested and inexperienced new principal to that school in 2005. Unfortunately, student achievement in Math and Reading declined over the next two years and in 2007 the Mollie E. Ray was graded an “F,” with only thirty-six percent of its students meeting state reading standards. In comparison, Rolling Hills Elementary has had the same principal in place for the last twelve years and has maintained a more stable school achievement record with similar community and student demographics to Mollie E. Ray.

Obviously, many factors other than school leadership contribute to the success or failure of a school, including effective parental engagement, teacher quality, and curriculum, and the FDOE is plan will likely stimulate improvements in these areas. At the same time, the FDOE plan does place great emphasis on the assignment of experienced principals to the failing schools. However, decisions to remove or transfer principals at failing or previously failing schools should be taken with caution as these schools may already be suffering from instability in leadership. “It’s very important to maintain stability in school leadership beyond one or two years because time is needed to

develop a faculty in a direction that moves a school forward,” said Dr. Patrick Galatowitsch, principal of Rolling Hills Elementary. Under his leadership, student achievement at Rolling Hills has remained consistent, with less instructional turnover than Mollie E. Ray and better overall school grades.

Figure 10: Comparison of Mollie E Ray Elementary and Rolling Hills Elementary

| Mollie E Ray Elementary-Orange | 2001-02 | 2002-03 | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| School Grade | F | C | B | A | B | D | F |
| % meeting reading standards | 24% | 47% | 59% | 71% | 64% | 44% | 36% |
| % meeting math standards | | | | 68% | 54% | 30% | 31% |
| % of newly hired teachers | - | 23.80% | 21.60% | 28% | 29% | 50% | - |
| % of classes w/ no highly qualified teacher | - | 33% | 29% | 14% | 25% | 0.50% | - |
| % newly hired principals | - | 0% | 0% | 50% | 0% | 0% | 100% |
| | | | | | | | |
| Rolling Hills Elementary-Orange | 2001-02 | 2002-03 | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 |
| School Grade | B | A | A | C | C | B | C |
| % meeting reading standards | 54% | 63% | 67% | 67% | 64% | 50% | 56% |
| % meeting math standards | 49% | 48% | 52% | 55% | 49% | 49% | 47% |
| % of newly hired teachers | - | 20% | 21% | 22% | 25% | 24% | - |
| % of classes w/ no highly qualified teacher | - | 8% | 11% | 5% | 15% | 2% | - |
| % newly hired principals | - | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |

The Plan to Improve the Lowest-Performing Schools

The FDOE initiative requires school districts to submit a plan by November 1, 2008 to deal with schools in the Intervene category. Districts can either plan to shut down the Intervene schools or shut down and re-open them as charter schools. If the schools demonstrate “significant progress” in the 2008-09 year by earning at least a C grade and improving on benchmarks set by the federal government, the state will release the schools from intervention status.

To encourage and support efforts in the upcoming school year, the FDOE will channel or redirect services to these schools, utilizing funds from a variety of existing sources such as Title I School Improvement Grants, Reading Allocation Grants, Supplemental Academic Instruction, and the Florida Partnership Grant. The districts will be required to focus their school improvement efforts on the neediest schools, the thirteen schools classified as “intervene schools.” Recognizing that a number of factors contribute to academic success, the FDOE plan calls for interventions and additional support services in nine critical areas.

To grasp the implications of the state’s plan to improve the academic performance of 13 failing schools, ENLACE FLORIDA researchers looked closely at the new steps recommended or mandated by the plan. Many of the state-mandated interventions are significant and even dramatic, designed to have an immediate impact on student academic performance. The list of interventions is too long to be enumerated and analyzed in this policy brief. Many of the support services that will be made available to the Intervene schools are already in place and will be offered to schools in the other categories as well. The following table highlights several of the most significant new interventions and services identified in the FDOE plan. (For the full Differentiated Accountability Model go to: <http://www.fldoe.org/news/>)

| AREA | NEW INTERVENTIONS | SUPPORT SERVICES |
|--|--|--|
| Improvement Planning | <p>School improvement plans will consider alternative service delivery models</p> <p>District develops plans to 1) close and reopen as a district-managed turn-around school; 2) close and reassign students to another school; 3) reopen as a charter; contract with an outside entity to run school; 4) restructure the school as a career institute</p> | <p>Extended teacher contract time to support data analysis and curriculum alignment</p> <p>Professional Learning Communities</p> <p>Extending the school day or school year</p> <p>Professional development in non-AYP areas (Title I School Improvement Grants)</p> |
| Leadership | <p>Assigned principals will have a record of turning around a similar school</p> <p>Principal's appraisal includes student achievement goals specifically targeting subgroups not making AYP</p> <p>High-performing teachers from high-performing schools are transferred to low-performing schools</p> <p>Principal assigned a professional partner with experience in improving student achievement in a similar school setting</p> <p>State monitors performance of leadership team</p> | <p>Leadership academy to train and support school leadership teams</p> <p>School improvement coaches</p> <p>Contracting with an outside evaluator</p> |
| Educator Quality | <p>State participates in staffing school</p> <p>District reassigns qualified teachers as needed</p> <p>District may declare emergency to suspend collective bargaining agreements</p> <p>State reviews district plan for determining teacher assignments</p> | <p>Extended teacher contract time to support data analysis and curriculum alignment (Title I School Improvement Grants)</p> |
| Professional Development | <p>Principal's leadership development plan specifies subgroups not making AYP</p> <p>IPDP for all teachers include components that address needs of subgroups and includes mentoring by a highly effective teacher</p> <p>Master schedule provides for professional development for all teachers directly related to student achievement in the subgroups not making AYP</p> <p>Teachers have direct access to student achievement data and are provided assistance in the use of the system</p> | <p>Teacher incentives for successful AP students</p> <p>Teacher professional development for AP courses</p> <p>Strategies for the early identification of students who are in the academic middle and are capable of completing a rigorous curriculum</p> |
| Curriculum Alignment | <p>Implement evidence-based curriculum model and school-wide reform model</p> <p>Monthly reporting on student progress</p> | <p>Appropriate research-based instructional materials and strategies are used to address specific student needs</p> <p>Implementing a new, more rigorous accelerated curriculum</p> |
| Continuous Improvement Model | <p>State monitors implementation and intervenes if required</p> <p>State analyzes monthly progress reports</p> <p>State monitors allocation of resources based on need</p> | <p>District provides progress monitoring tools and analyzes data to determine effectiveness of instruction and to allocate resources based on need</p> <p>District ensures that schools demonstrating the greatest need, based on data analysis, receive the highest percentage of resources</p> |
| Choice with Transportation | <p>District inform parents of choice options and provides transportation</p> | |
| Supplemental Educational Services | <p>State grades service providers</p> | <p>Intensive Reading and Mathematics classes</p> <p>Intensive English immersion</p> <p>Extended school day, school year, or summer school</p> |
| Monitoring Plans and Processes | <p>Superintendent reports progress to FDOE monthly and bi-monthly to State Board of Education</p> | |

FDOE Establishes a Regional Support System

During the 2008-09 school year, the FDOE will establish a new regional support system designed to provide technical assistance to schools and monitor the implementation of the pilot program. The state will be divided into five regions, each directed by a person with a record of success in improving student performance in schools with similar demographic profiles. The objective of the new regional directors is to “ensure comprehensive and sustainable school improvement.” The FDOE plan calls for the appointment of “change agents” who will “support school improvement efforts in the region, build district capacity, provide and broker professional development, and coach and mentor school principals and the school and district leadership teams.” The main functions of the regional leaders will be to collect and monitor data, provide professional development opportunities, and provide direct support to schools and districts.

The regional director will be assisted by a team that includes school improvement facilitators “that are experts in primary and secondary curriculum and pedagogy and have content-area knowledge.” These facilitators will “support the development and evaluation of district and school improvement plans, monitor the implementation of interventions, and provide other school improvement services.”

The creation of a regional support team for the sole purpose of promoting comprehensive and sustainable school improvement under NCLB is a significant change in state education governance and policies. The success of the regional support system hinges in large part on the ability of the regional directors to build constructive relationships with teachers and administrators. The five regional directors recently appointed by the FDOE bring experience as teachers, principals, administrators, and scholars. They will have to work closely with schools in their regions, so it is important that they approach their new jobs as facilitators for school improvement. A brief profile and proposed location of the five regional directors follows:

Region 1 (Panhandle)

Nikolai Paul-Carlo Viti, a doctoral candidate in Education at Harvard University, served as a Principal at Homestead Middle School in Miami-Dade, 2007-08, where he increased the schools’ FCAT letter grade from a D to a B.

Region 2 (North Florida)

Leila Mousa earned a M.A. in Educational Leadership at the University of North Florida, and served most recently as the Assistant to the Superintendent in Duval County Public Schools.

Region 3 (East Central Florida)

Joseph Burke earned an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Nova University. From 2001 to 2008 he served as the Superintendent of Schools in Springfield, Massachusetts, where he improved the performance of African American and Latino students on state tests.

Region 4 (West Central Florida)

Gail Daves has a M.A. in Reading Education from Appalachian State University and experience in improving low performing schools in North Carolina. She served as a consultant to the College Board EXCELEerator Schools Project, which has been implemented in Hillsborough County.

Region 5 (South Florida)

Jeffrey Hernandez recently served as the Administrative Director for Curriculum and Instruction in Miami-Dade County Public Schools. He has experience implementing school reform initiatives and served as a principal at Lakeview Elementary School (2004-07).

Response of Schools and Districts to the FDOE Initiative

Districts and schools are reacting quickly to FDOE's pilot program while expressing cautious optimism and reasonable concern. James Notter, Superintendent of Broward Schools, notes that while Commissioner Smith has built trust and communicated well with superintendents around the state, he predicts that the success of the pilot program will depend on how it is implemented.⁵

One of the major concerns districts have is related to the ever escalating AYP percentage requirement that moves up approximately 7% every year. Last year, NCLB required 58% of students within a school to demonstrate proficiency in reading and 62% proficiency in math in order to meet AYP. Next year, the requirements are expected to rise. "How do you harness a system of accountability when the bar continues to rise every single year?" asks Jeff Eakins, Director of Federal Programs for Hillsborough County Public Schools. "It's a moving target every year and it will ultimately result in many high performing schools being categorized as Correct II schools under Florida's new plan," said Eakins.

The new regional support offices and staff is an addition that some districts welcome. "We're excited about the regional support offices," said Karen Wilson, Principal on Assignment from Orange County Schools. "We believe they will help bring extra focus and support to our schools." Introductory meetings between district administrators and regional FDOE staff have already begun to work out the details of implementing the plan and aligning it with school improvement processes already in place at the district level. Although, it is far too early to know for sure how this new plan will be received by districts and school personnel, the initial responses are promising.

Policy Implications

The Differentiated Accountability Plan represents an ambitious effort to turn around failing schools by targeting resources and support services to the state's neediest schools. It represents a significant departure from past policies and procedures under NCLB. At this early stage of its implementation, ENLACE FLORIDA expresses qualified support and cautious optimism. The plan's objective—improving failing schools—deserves the full cooperation and immediate attention of all school boards, superintendents, principals, teachers, students, and parents. Nearly 11,000 students are in these troubled schools, and any delay in efforts to improve their academic performance will have a significant impact on their academic futures.

The Commissioner and the Department of Education have given the plan and its implementation careful thought. As they move forward, they should keep the lines of communication open to all schools and districts, respect differences of opinion, evaluate the results, and revise the plan as needed during implementation to achieve the greater goal of improving academic performance at failing schools. The plan should be implemented with the same deliberation with which it was conceived and with an appropriate mix of urgency and caution. We must move quickly, but the FDOE must be flexible and solicit input from all stakeholders to ensure that the plan is carefully tailored to meet the particular needs of the students served by the schools and districts.

As the districts develop their school improvement plans, they should consider, for example, appropriate tools to incentivize and reward principals for turning around their respective schools. The plan is based on the understanding that effective leadership can make a difference in student academic performance over time. If administrators are willing to take on the task of boosting academic performance at failing schools, they should be rewarded for doing so and encouraged to stay on the job. The FDOE could work with districts to develop a differentiated annual bonus plan for principals with reward levels based on a formula, similar to FEFP, that takes into account impor-

⁵ Marc Freeman, "Three of Florida's Most Low-Performing Schools are in Palm Beach and Broward Counties," *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, July 30, 2008.

tant school-based variables such as school poverty rates, student mobility rates, and community crime rates that would produce a “school-turnaround difficulty index” score that could be used to accurately measure challenging assignments. If they go on to demonstrate success, they should be monetarily rewarded for their efforts.

The Florida Department of Education has raised expectations significantly, and ENLACE FLORIDA endorses the general idea that students, teachers, and administrators will rise to higher levels of expectations. Significant successes can be achieved in one school year, but it will likely take several years for principals and teachers to produce *systemic* change. Many of these schools have suffered from instability in leadership, so it is important to give a principal the time and support required to make a real and permanent difference in these underperforming schools.

Effective leadership is one of several factors contributing to success in our public schools. The Differentiated Accountability Plan, by recognizing and providing support services in nine critical areas, including educator quality and professional development, highlights the path toward further improvements. If we expect schools and districts to concentrate on providing effective leaders, improving teacher quality, providing equitable access to technology, and supporting professional development—as called for in the new plan—they should be held accountable for their efforts in these areas. Now that the state has adopted a broader accountability model for high schools that reduces the weight of FCAT scores to only 50% of a school’s grade, the time has come for the state to develop broader accountability measurements for elementary and middle schools. In fact, Commissioner Eric Smith is forming a state advisory group that will be considering reforms to the accountability system. ENLACE FLORIDA encourages this new state advisory board to consider using the measures of intervention highlighted in the Differentiated Accountability Program as a step toward a more comprehensive school grading formula for all schools.

In the 2008-09 school year, nearly 11,000 students are attending thirteen schools that have failed their students for five years. The students demand and deserve our immediate attention and our best efforts to provide them with their constitutional right to a quality education. Critics and skeptics throughout the state are likely to point out flaws in this new accountability system and the plan to improve these schools. However, ENLACE FLORIDA encourages all education stakeholders to offer constructive criticism designed to improve and support this bold effort to turn failing schools into models of success.



ENLACE FLORIDA is a statewide network funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and managed by NCCEP to promote college readiness, access, and success for Latinos, African-Americans, and other underrepresented students through non-partisan research, communication, advocacy, and support.

For more information, go to: www.enlaceflorida.org

ENLACE FLORIDA, 4202 E. Fowler Avenue SOC 107, Tampa, FL 33620
Phone: 813.974.3673 Fax: 813.974.1050 Web: www.enlaceflorida.org