

Third-party Evaluation Report

Year 2

Smaller Learning Communities Implementation Grant

**North Port High School
Sarasota District Schools
Sarasota, Florida**

3/15/07

Prepared by:

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Third-party Evaluation Report: Year 2

Introduction/Background

The third-party evaluation report was prepared by George Reid, Ph.D., Principal Consultant with the *Performance Design Group*, Sarasota, Florida. The evaluation covers the 3-year Smaller Learning Communities Implementation grant project awarded to Sarasota County Schools/North Port High School for the period 7/1/04 – 6/30/06. This report covers the **2nd year** of the project, including relevant data through **3/15/07**.

North Port High is one of 5 large high schools in Sarasota County, with a grades 9 - 12 enrollment of 2,090 students in the 2005-2006 school year. Enrollment at the time of report preparation (October 2006) was 2,438. The enrollment composition (October 2005) was 19.8% minority (7.2% Black, 7.9% Hispanic), 30% economically disadvantaged, 16.1% disabled, and 4.8% limited English proficient. Opened in the fall of 2001, North Port High School is the first school in Sarasota County to be entirely designed around the philosophy of career academies. The physical structure, schedule and selection of teachers and support staff have all been guided by the concept of career academies. The facility also includes a full service media center, four computer labs, a career center lab, four science laboratories, a fine arts/performing arts center as well as career/technical education classrooms and a teen pregnancy program. North Port offers an array of Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment courses.

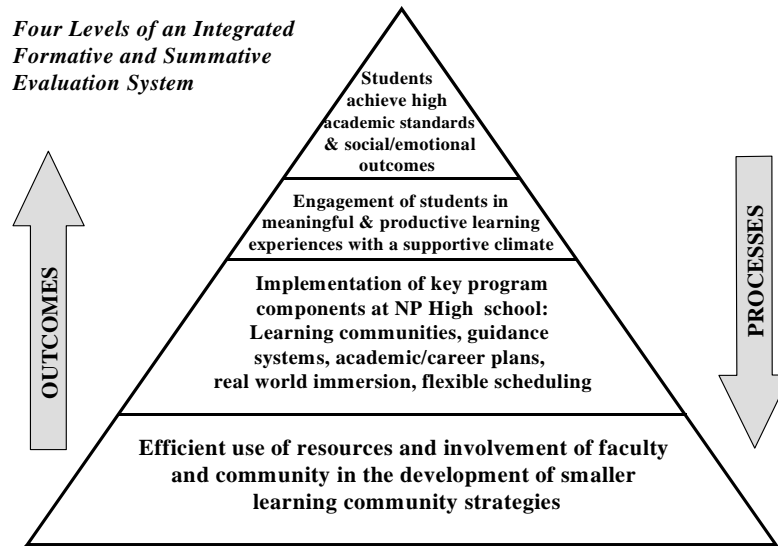
The implementation grant for North Port complements a Cohort 2 district-wide SLC grant covering the additional four (4) large high schools in the district. This overall district-wide focus on Smaller Learning Communities implementation provides a supportive context for development of SLCs at North Port, offering district direction, combined professional development opportunities, and sharing/networking with other high schools. The 2004-2005 school year represented the 3rd year of implementation for the other four high schools.

Evaluation Design

The project evaluation design is guided by the model presented below (Figure 1). The model is adapted from Stufflebeam's CIPP model, with levels roughly corresponding to Context, Input, Process, and Products. The formative evaluation design follows models offered by Dick & Carey for data collection and the ASCD Stages of Concern and Levels of Use of Innovation models, with an emphasis on level of implementation of key program components.

During the first year of the project, evaluation data collection has focused primarily on the process, input and context levels of the evaluation design, guided by the six (6) implementation grant goals. However, with data collection systems in place for Cohort 2 high schools, it is convenient to begin summarizing results and student outcome data as well.

Figure 1: Graphic Evaluation Model



Data collection system and Annual Performance Reports

The ongoing focus of evaluation development is a data collection system focusing on key performance indicators of student academic performance and important social/emotional/health outcomes. Specific indicators are delineated in **Table 1**. Outcome data will be referenced to a 3-year baseline, covering years 2001-2002 through 2003-2004. Trends in student outcomes were tracked forward into 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007.

Data elements from the U.S. Department of Education *Annual Performance Report* guides data collection and reporting for North Port High. This report is prepared and submitted by June 30th of each project year. Definitions of these data elements for school background, SLC strategies and student outcomes are consistent with Florida Department of Education accountability reports and this evaluation design.

The district has a well-developed data collection and reporting system for all performance data. All performance data are required by the State of Florida, are communicated electronically to the State annually, and are presented to the public on the Department of Education Web site at http://doeweb-prd.doe.state.fl.us/eds/nclbpar/nclb0506.cfm?dist_schl=58_1251.

Table 1: Evaluation Questions/Ongoing Performance Measures

Summative Evaluation Question Areas	Data Source/Instrument	Schedule/Responsibility
1. Number of students scoring at Level 3 or above in the reading and mathematics, 3 or above writing sections of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT); gains (e.g. year's growth) in norm-referenced sections of FCAT.	Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) administered in February – March of each school year. Data compiled by State and reported electronically to district and public	Data available in June of each year: June 2005, June 2006, and June 2007 Research/Assessment Dept./ evaluation consultant
2. Number of students taking the SAT and ACT will increase by 10%; the average scores of students taking the SAT/ACT will increase	Scores compiled by district and reported electronically as part of EQUIP reporting system	Data available June of each year: June 2005, June 2006, and June 2007 Research/Assessment Dept./ evaluation consultant
3. Number of students taking dual enrollment and/or AP courses	Enrollment data compiled by district uniform Course Code Directory and verified by school data	Data available in early spring of each year June 2005, June 2006, and June 2007 Research/Assessment Dept./evaluation consultant
4. Number of students completing high school with a standard diploma	Part of Department of Education School Reporting System: Data recorded by district, compiled by State and reported electronically to district and public	Data available June of each year: June 2005, June 2006, and June 2007 Research/Assessment Dept./ evaluation consultant
5. Number of students involved in extracurricular activities	School-based data collection system was created during 2001-2002 for uniform data reporting on this measure	Project Coordinator/ Evaluation Consultant Spring of 2005, 2006, 2007
6. Number of incidents of student violence; number of suspensions and expulsions; number students reporting alcohol or drug use	Part of Department of Education School Reporting System: Data recorded by district, compiled by State and reported electronically to district and public; also, annual Youth Risk Behavior Survey.	Data available June of each year: June 2005, June 2006, June 2007 Research/Assessment Dept./ evaluation consultant
7. Reported average daily attendance	Attendance reporting is reported to State DOE	Data available October each year: 2005, 2006, 2007. Research/Assessment Dept./ evaluation consultant

8. Improvements in key components of school climate	Annual school climate survey for high schools (administered by school district and customizable for inclusion of key question areas.	Data available June of each year: June 2005, June 2006, and June 2007 Research/Assessment Dept./ evaluation consultant
9. Improvements in key components of learning environment	Locally designed surveys, focus group interviews, observations, and document/ policy analysis: students, faculty, community partners	Evaluation consultant with assistance of principals, project coordinator; collaboration with Univ. S. Florida
10. Student ratings of personal goal orientation, career preparation factors, and guidance systems	Locally designed surveys, focus group interviews, observations, and document/ policy analysis: students, faculty, guidance staff, administration, parents	Evaluation consultant with assistance of principals, project coordinator; collaboration with Univ. S. Florida

Table 1A: Formative/Process Evaluation Measures: Level of Implementation

Formative/Process Evaluation Question Areas	Data Source/Instrument	Schedule/Responsibility
1. Adherence to major project timelines and schedules; efficient use of resources as planned/ budgeted; involvement of key stakeholders as planned	Guided by Management Matrix/ Action Plan: schedule, products and milestones; district and school	Project Coordinator, evaluation consultant, school principals, School Director of Secondary Schools, Executive Director of Workforce Development Quarterly/Annual review Spring 2005, 2006, 2007
2. Implementation of key components at each school: vertical communities, Advisory program, guidance /mentoring systems, academic/ career plans, community service, business partnerships, flexible scheduling	A "level of implementation" checklist will be developed for each program component. The checklist guides assessment via product analysis, interviews, surveys, and structured focus group discussions	Evaluation consultant/school coordinators, project coordinator, school principals. Quarterly data collection with annual review Spring 2005, 2006, 2007
3. Engagement of students in meaningful & productive learning experiences; development of a climate of support, collaboration and professional inquiry; teacher and student ownership, personalization of programs, community partnership.	Interviews, focus groups, products/observation, survey instruments administered to students, faculty, and community partners. District Climate Survey administered annually	Evaluation consultant with assistance of Project Manager, school coordinators, principals, and district RAE dept. Spring 2005, 2006, 2007

Data Collection Methods for 2005-2006

During the 2005-2006 school year (through February 2007), the evaluator engaged in the following data collection activities:

- Conducted site visits with career academy leaders and teachers; attended selected academy team meetings
- Interviewed school principal, assistant principals, and SLC coordinator
- Conducted focus group discussions with school leadership team
- Conducted interviews with teachers and students
- Conducted a survey of a sample of faculty and staff
- Received communications from SLC coordinator and academy leaders
- Reviewed documents produced by school and individual academies
- Accompanied principal and SLC coordinator to attend SLC evaluation/planning conference in Atlanta
- Attended district SLC coordinator meetings
- Attended selected district-wide professional development activities with faculty and administrators
- Requested and received data in electronic and print form from district Research and Evaluation Department and Florida Department of Education according to schedule in above tables

Progress Related to Original Goals of the Implementation Grant

Six goals provide the focus for the SLC grant: *student advisory periods, expanding vertical learning communities, advising/guidance and mentoring systems, flexible/block scheduling, four-year career/academic plans, and job shadowing/internships/community service*. With a strong foundation from the initial design of NPHS, significant progress has been made on all goals during the first year of the grant. **Advisory periods** have been implemented, supported by faculty training, new curriculum materials, and a school-wide emphasis on the importance of these periods. The content of advisory sessions is cooperatively developed by faculty, guidance, and administration. **Learning communities** continue to be reexamined and improved, both in structure and delivery. In the fall of 2005, six academies were available to students: Media & Performing Arts, Science & Environmental Science, Health Science & Human Services, Leadership & International Studies, Information Technology, and Small Business & Entrepreneurship. The Small Business & Entrepreneurship Academy was added for the 2005-2006 school year. Membership in the academies is 630 (CA), 119 (ES), 465 (HHS), 353 (LIS), 313 (IMT), and 240 (SBE) for the 2005-2006 school year. Several changes and enhancements have been made to **advising, guidance and mentoring systems**. Two software systems have been implemented to enhance student planning and program tracking. The district has implemented *SmartWeb*, which allows parents and students to access student program, attendance, grades, and assignments from home computers. Link Crew recruits juniors and seniors to provide mentoring for freshmen, and several academic intervention processes have been implemented to identify and provide assistance to students with academic difficulties. **Block scheduling** has been implemented school-wide, with flexible modifications allowing for a

full year of English and student schedules for SCTI courses. Professional development in curriculum mapping and interdisciplinary instruction, as well as cooperative learning has been provided during summer sessions and throughout the school year. **Four-year career/academic plans** have been developed for each student, built upon a foundation of assessment and advising that begins in grade 9 and continues each year. Guidance lesson plans have been developed and guidance sessions are presented to students during English and/or advising periods. Additional strategies for articulation with middle schools have been implemented, included early advising of students in grade 8 to assisting in planning their high school programs and begin initial career planning. **Table 2** outlines details of progress on program goals/objectives.

Project success is measured from two perspectives (1) **implementation of major program components** and (2) **outcomes and impacts – primarily affecting students**. Significant progress can be demonstrated for all project goals. All students and faculty are associated with an academy, and significant progress has been made in establishing the identity of each academy. Student advisory periods are working well and faculty ownership is clearly established for the advisory experience as well as academy identities. Work remains to be done for each goal, however, to deepen implementation. Strategies for advising, personalization, and academic assistance, especially for freshmen and sophomores need to be enhanced. Community linkages, including opportunities for job shadowing and internships need to be greatly expanded.

During 2005-2006, several adjustments and enhancements were made to the original goals and strategy structure, including: (1) extending implementation and building faculty commitment to process, (2) improving the offering of pure academy classes (classrooms in which all enrolled students and their teachers are in the same academy) (3) expansion of community involvement, and (4) additional professional development focusing on instructional strategies. In addition to strategies directly indicated by grant goals, the district continues to advance the *NeXt Generation Strategic Vision*, which includes a comprehensive approach to improving instructional *engagement, alignment and rigor* at the high school level. These strategies, which include classroom observations, instrumented feedback, and professional development offer additional strategies aimed at improving student performance.

Several positive outcomes were summarized by teachers in a focus interview:

- Increased interdisciplinary communication, awareness and cooperation
- Increased sharing of student information and strategies for student support
- Increased knowledge of students and their needs, allowing greater personalization and support
- Improved student behavior, on-task behavior, attendance and completion of assignments/homework
- Increased student collaboration across grade levels (on projects, mentoring, etc.)
- Increased attention to academic, post-secondary and career planning on the part of students
- Improvements in ability to connect academic program and activities to careers, post-secondary planning and the “real world”

Table 2: Program Objectives

Program Objectives/ Milestones	Changes	Status	Comments
Implement weekly advisory periods	Original goal is on track	<p>Approximately 22, 40 min. advisory sessions offered in 05-06</p> <p>Each faculty member works with approximately 30 advisees</p> <p>Training/orientation for faculty prior to each advisory session</p> <p>Advisory curriculum tailored for each academy and grade level</p> <p>Special mentoring teams established for ESOL and minority students not achieving FCAT level 3</p> <p>Faculty training by common topics derived from series + school-wide guidance agenda: guest speakers, career-academic planning, FCAT prep, information dissemination</p>	<p>This goal has progressed well. Teachers and students are enthusiastic and receptive to the experiences. The initial training and guidance materials were effective. The curriculum as well as number of sessions continues to be expanded.</p>
Expand number of 9-12 learning communities/academies	No changes through 06-07. The structure of the communities may be re-examined in future years in response to structure of statewide “majors” program or internal needs	<p>Addition of new wing has added 36 new classrooms and laboratory facilities</p> <p>Increasing enrollments necessitate development of additional academies and redefining existing academies to balance membership and meet student needs</p> <p>Refinements to the newest Business & Entrepreneurship academy, with an enrollment of 217 students (Fall 2005); winner of Supt’s. Quality Award)</p> <p>Restructuring of academies to meet student interests (e.g., Communication Arts, Visual Arts, Performing Arts)</p> <p>Six academies to total, with memberships ranging from 117 to 617 (Fall 2005)</p> <p>Assistant Principals and guidance counselors have been assigned to each academy</p> <p>Training and hiring of additional qualified Advanced Placement teachers to expand course offerings in each academy</p>	<p>This goal is on schedule. Strategies for grade 9 transition and addressing the needs of freshmen is being examined in the context of 9-12 academies.</p>

		<p>Dedicated physical facilities and activities to develop identity for each academy</p> <p>Professional development for faculty in Professional Learning Communities/study groups: Brazosport model (February – May: 15 hours, 15 teachers)</p>	
<p>Redesign advising/ guidance/ mentoring – frequent monitoring of student progress, interventions for at-risk students.</p>	<p>Original goal is on track.</p>	<p>Statewide program has required planning for high school “majors” in grade 8</p> <p>Link Crew mentoring in 9th grade</p> <p>Implemented computer-based guidance system</p> <p>Developed and implemented 9th grade study skills curriculum</p> <p>Expanded parent involvement/family advocacy activities in grades 9 & 10</p> <p>Periodic review of students with Academic Improvement Plans (AIPs)</p> <p>After school tutoring Mondays and Thursday; athletes study hall</p> <p>Action research project examining attendance, tardiness, & ID best practices</p> <p>IAT – intensive assistance team/SST</p>	<p>Implementation of this goal is subject to continuous formative evaluation and enhancement based on the response from students and additional research and learning on the part of the staff.</p>
<p>Phase in flexible or block scheduling; project-based learning, cooperative learning, community involvement.</p>	<p>Original goal is on track.</p>	<p>Schedules restructured to obtain maximum flexibility and meet student needs (1/2 credit classes for exploration; block, A/B block, full year English, SCTI scheduling)</p> <p>Additional need-based reading groups scheduled in grades 9/10</p> <p>Faculty training and development in Curriculum Mapping w/Kathy Harris (3 days, 100 teachers)</p> <p>Teachers created interdisciplinary lessons within academies (April: 20 teachers)</p> <p>Additional professional development in instructional strategies for block: project-based learning, cooperative learning (Oct. – April: 2 days, 15 teachers)</p> <p>Supplemental resources for professional development from Gulf Coast Foundation SGE grant</p>	<p>Implementation of this goal is subject to continuous formative evaluation and enhancement based on the results from piloting alternative scheduling formats. The staff continues to learn from experience and research in this area.</p>

<p>Develop & implement four-year career/academic plans; interest/style assessments, career exploration, career academy selection.</p>	<p>Original goal is on track.</p>	<p>Revised to reflect new structure of high school “majors” Implemented 4-year career/academic planning tool; student/parent online access component in development Developed series of guidance lesson plans and PowerPoint/online resources & materials; guidance activities conducted during English classes in September—October: topics include PSAT, career interest survey, college planning 9th grade guidance system; evolved into <i>Facts.org</i> Conducted career/interest inventories with 9th grade to assist in identifying academies/4-year plan; utilized online Career Exploration program Implemented components of <i>Florida Choices</i> program for 9 – 12 planning; each student in 9 – 12 has developed a Choices Career Portfolio Coordination with middle school, including visits to orient 8th graders to academy structure</p>	<p>Planning tool is well developed and effective. Software support and communication interface with students and parents continues to be enhanced with technology.</p>
<p>Incorporate job shadowing, internships and community service projects into instructional program.</p>	<p>Original goal remains intact – details of implementation need to be specified.</p>	<p>Developed additional business partnerships for job shadowing, internships and teacher externships; shadowing/internships tailored for academies (e.g., health care, Habit for Humanity, North Port Health Park/Bon Secours Hospital) Developed application, screening and placement process for job shadowing and internships Implemented career-related community service activities for academy groups Senior project program in development Additional partnerships with government agencies: NP Police, SC Sheriffs/Fire Dept Professional development conducted by Career/Technical Education department</p>	<p>Progress on this goal is behind schedule. Additional community partners and teacher involvement is needed. Progress is being made in teacher shadowing.</p>

Analysis of Implementation Progress

In 2001- 2002, North Port High School, opened with 682 9th and 10th graders. With the addition of grades 11 and 12, enrollment grew to over 1500 in the 2003-2004 school year; enrollment was **2089 in October of 2005**. The physical layout, curriculum and schedule, as well as the faculty hiring process, were designed to support an environment of career-themed academies; consistent with this educational design, a new wing affording 36 new classrooms was opened in the fall of 2006. This overall school philosophy provided a solid foundation for further development of the Smaller Learning Communities concept. In applying for a SLC implementation grant, the school and district believed that the original foundation could be enhanced and expanded through additional SLC strategies. These strategies would become even more critical as the school enrollment increased at a rapid pace.

The first year of implementation proved to be a year of learning and redefining the direction of the school. During the 2005-2006 school year, the district continued their focus on high school reform, the *NeXt Generation Strategic Vision*, which build upon the SLC experiences of the Cohort 2 implementation schools. Any faculty resistance or hesitance to implement the components of Smaller Learning Communities was exacerbated by the district's initiatives in NeXt Generation Learning. Many teachers felt overwhelmed and confused by the number of reform initiatives, how (if) the initiatives were interrelated, and how the new practices and technology connected with the foundation of SLCs already in place. The implementation issues and conclusions of a formative/implementation study are contained in a separate report (*Sarasota High Schools Reform Initiatives - Formative Evaluation Final Report, June 2006, Evaluation Systems Design*).

Table 2 outlines the progress made for each implementation goal. For the second year of implementation, considerable progress has been made for each goal. Progress details are supported by teachers' and students' responses during structured interviews (spring of 2006) as well as by evidence from school process data. The activities surrounding student advisory experience are especially evident and teachers seem to be enthusiastic about advisory impacts. Student reactions have not been assessed at this time. Also, the addition of the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Academy with 200+ students has been well received and is functioning smoothly, as is the Media and Performing Arts Academy, following expansion and restructuring. All academies are doing an excellent job of advancing their identities through student activities, promotional materials, and special events. The principal and staff continue to examine block scheduling to identify alternatives to improve flexibility and effectiveness.

Indications of Student Impacts/Learning Outcomes

FCAT Assessment

State assessment (*Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test - FCAT*) scores in reading and mathematics are the most universal indicator of academic progress in grades 9 & 10. These scores are presented below. The most recent scores (2006) represent students tested in February 2006, or midway through the *second year of implementation*.

Figure 2A

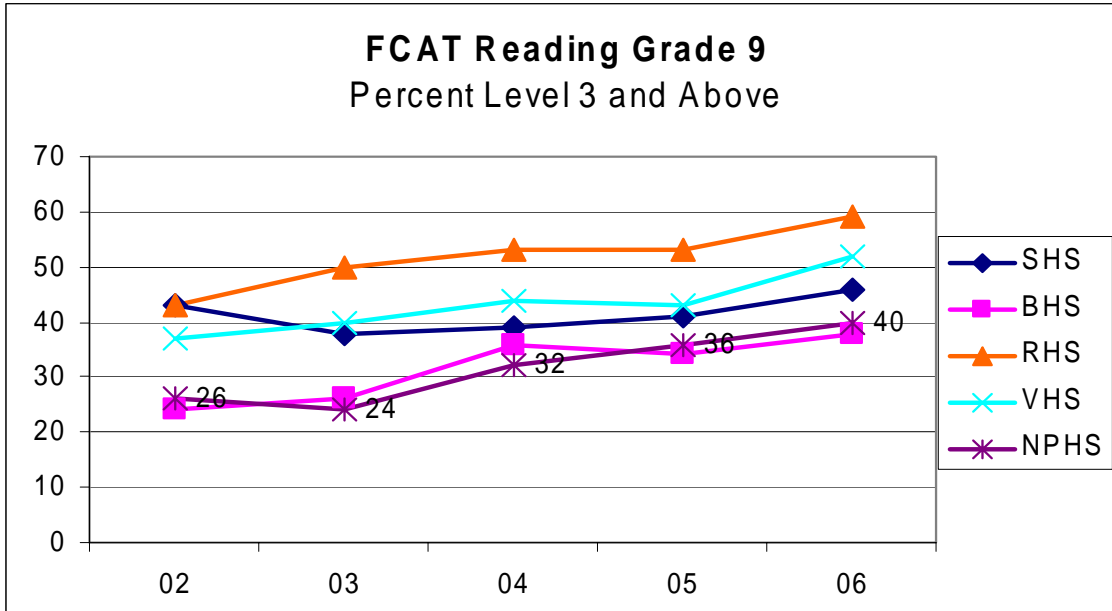


Figure 2B

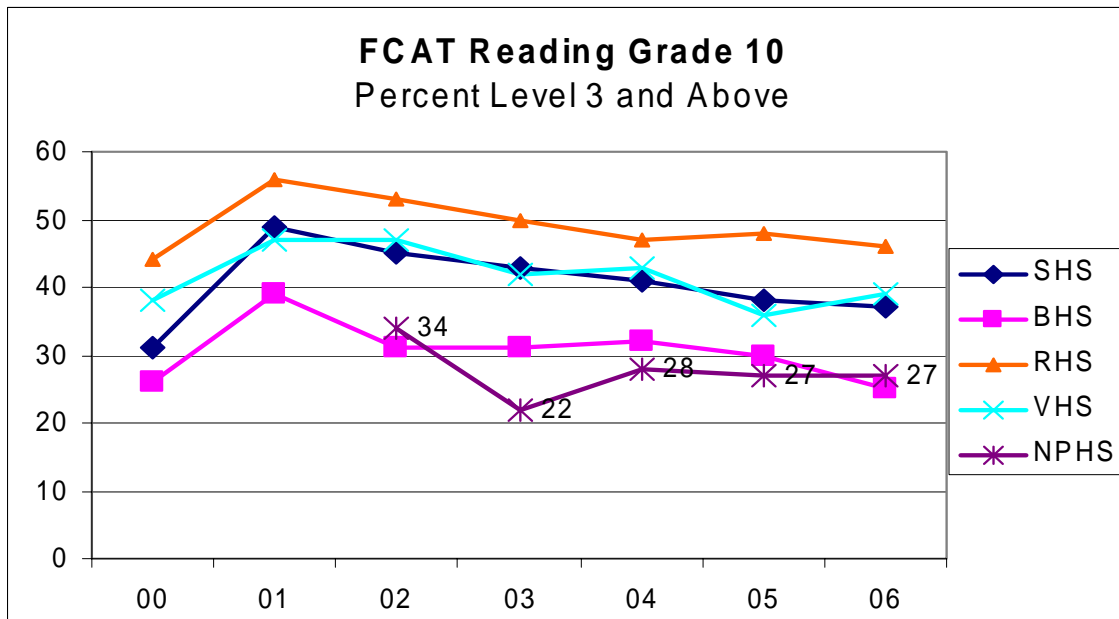


Figure 2A displays a continuing improvement in 9th grade **reading** scores from 2003 – 2006, while **Figure 2B** indicates an inconsistent or flat trend for grade 10. **Figures 3A and 3B** present an inconsistent trend for grade 9 and 10 in **mathematics**. All four sets of data, however, report on a changing student population of students due to increasing enrollments and student mobility.

Figure 3A

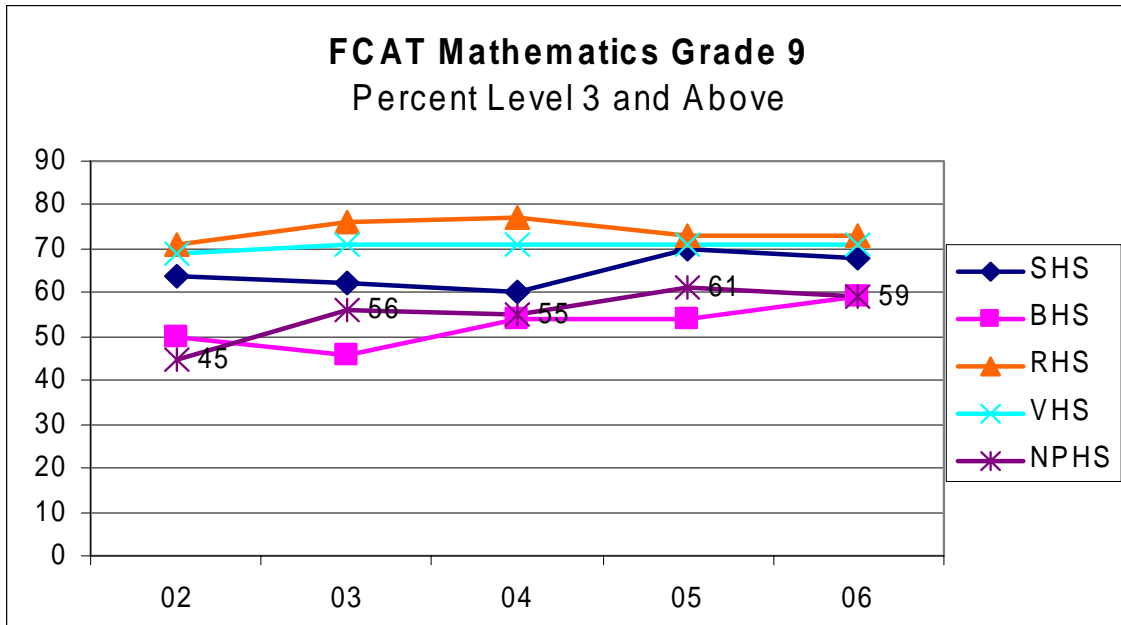
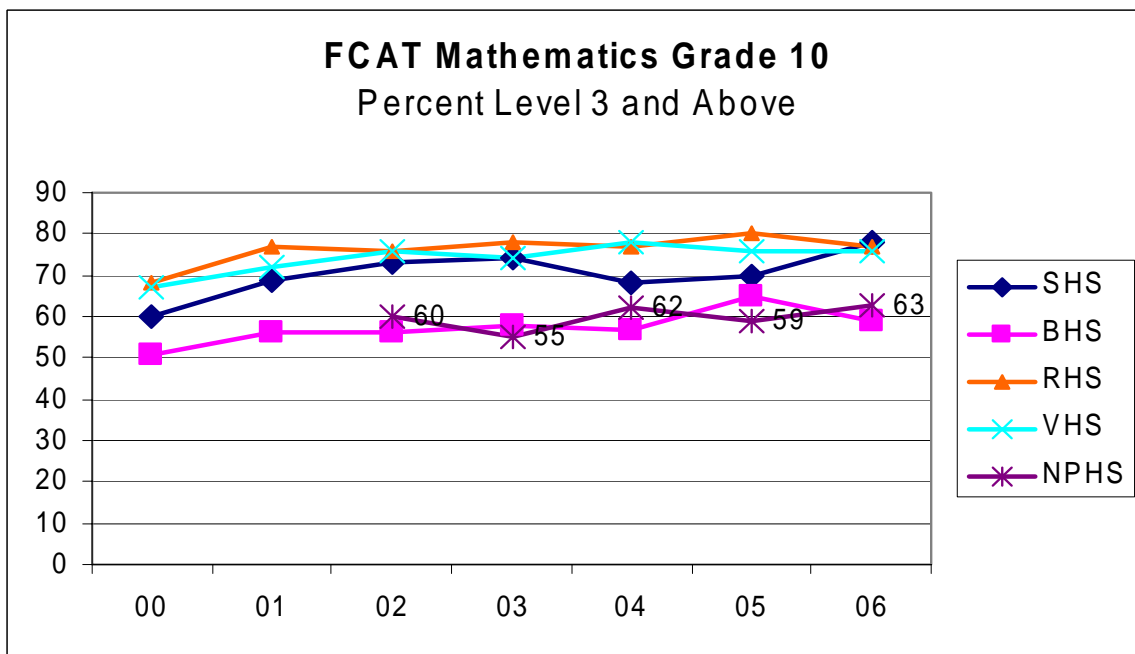


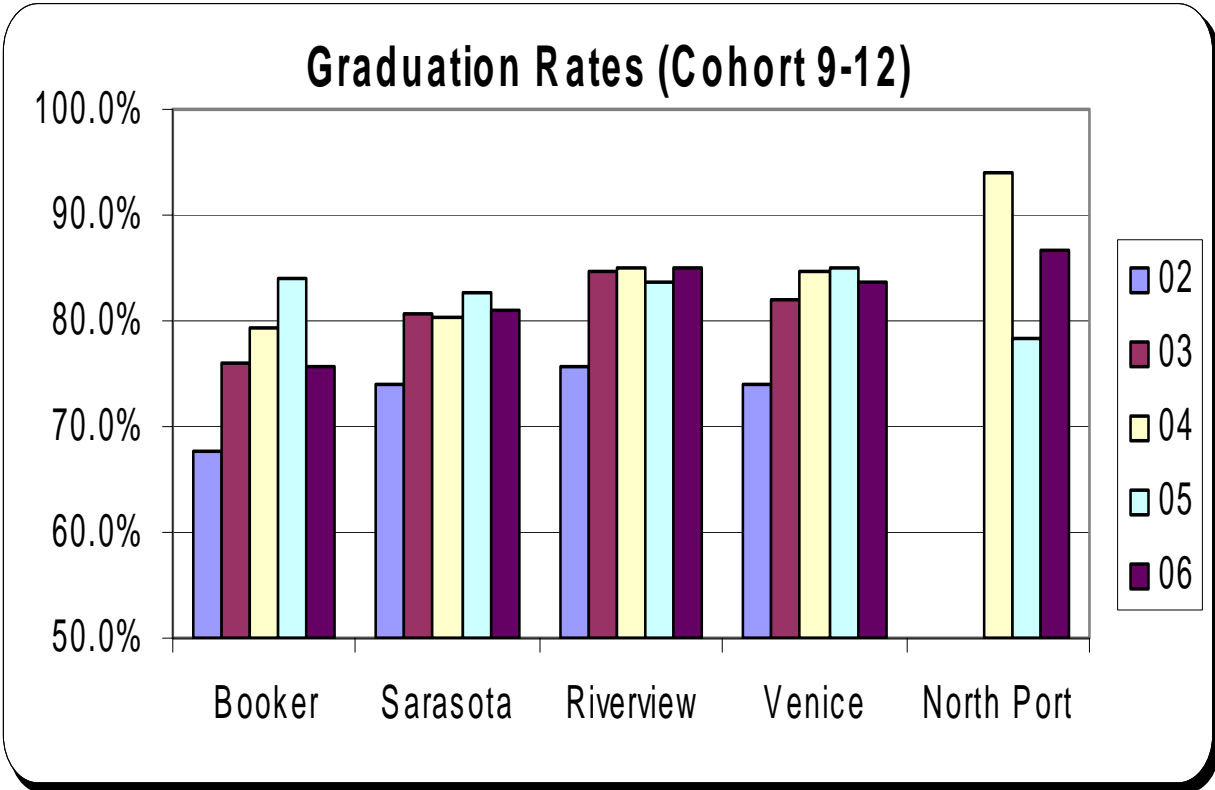
Figure 3B



Graduation Rates

The average graduation rate across all high schools climbed to around 85% in 2004, then fell to 82-83% in 2005. **North Port's** graduation rate increased to 86.7% in 2006.

Figure 4: Graduation Rates



Attendance and Absenteeism

During the first year of SLC implementation at NPHS, *attendance rates* increased from 92.4% to 93.3% in grade 9, and from 91.4% to 93.1% in grade 10 (**Figure 7A**). Rates for grade 11 show a similar trend, but grade 12 exhibits a slight decrease (**Figure 7B**). With the 05-06 data, however, a general downward trend becomes evident overall. (*See notes later on accuracy of data.)

Figure 7A: Attendance Rates for Grades 9 & 10

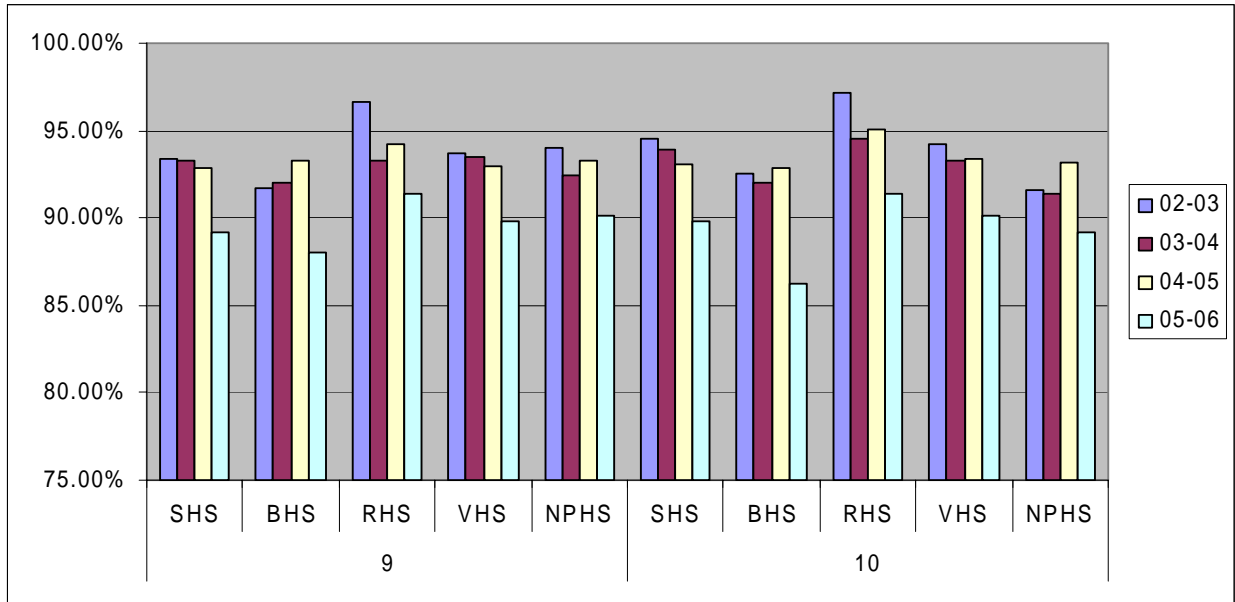
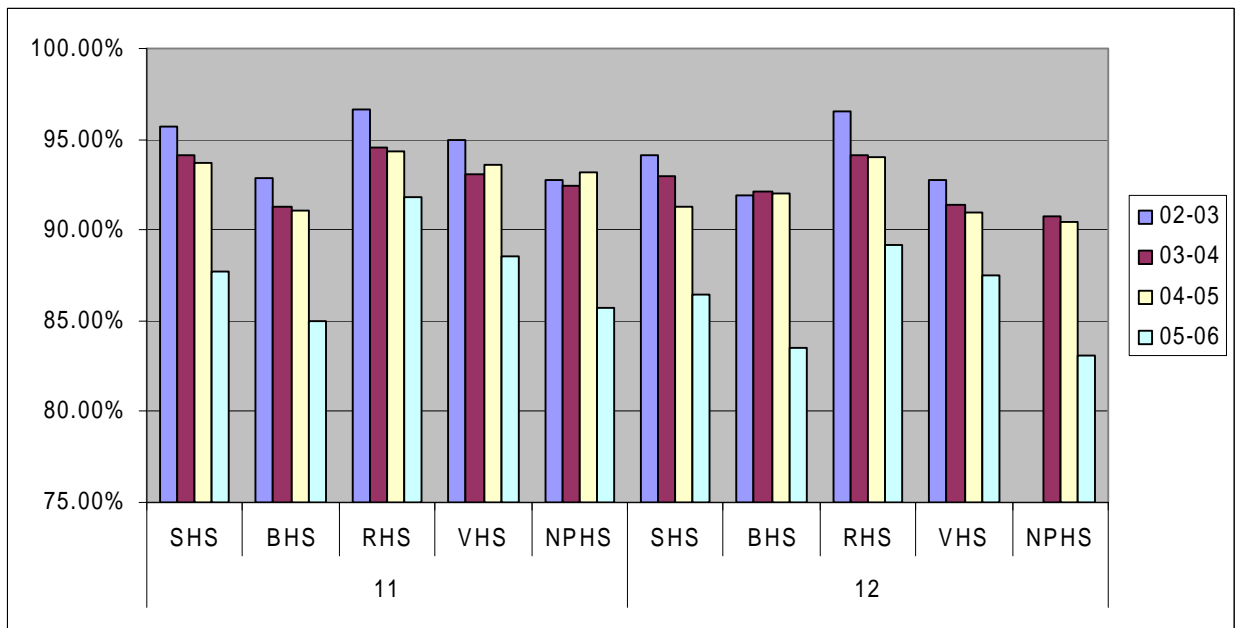


Figure 7B: Attendance Rates for Grades 11 & 12



Excessive absences are defined as students missing 21 days or more. **Figures 8A** and **8B** displayed a positive trend in this measure for North Port High for both 9th and 10th grades through 2004-2005. Similar trends existed for other schools through 2005, but excessive absences increased significantly for all schools in 2006. (*See discussion later regarding data accuracy and rationale for these trends.)

Figure 8A

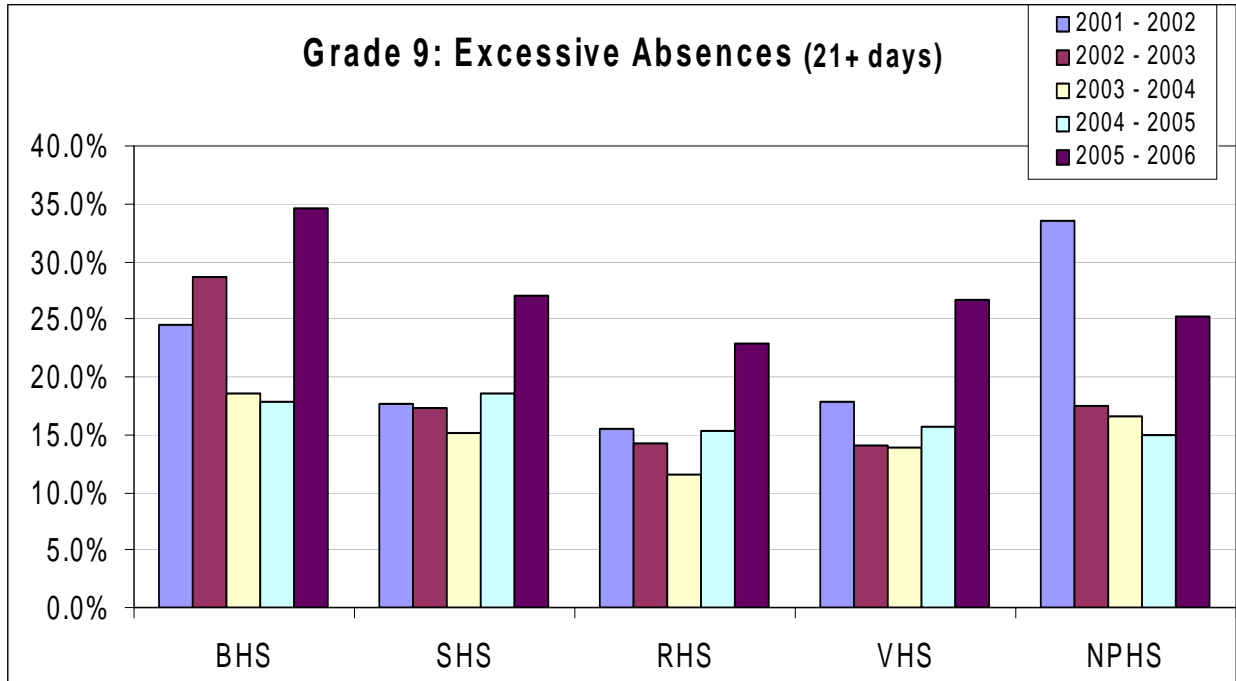
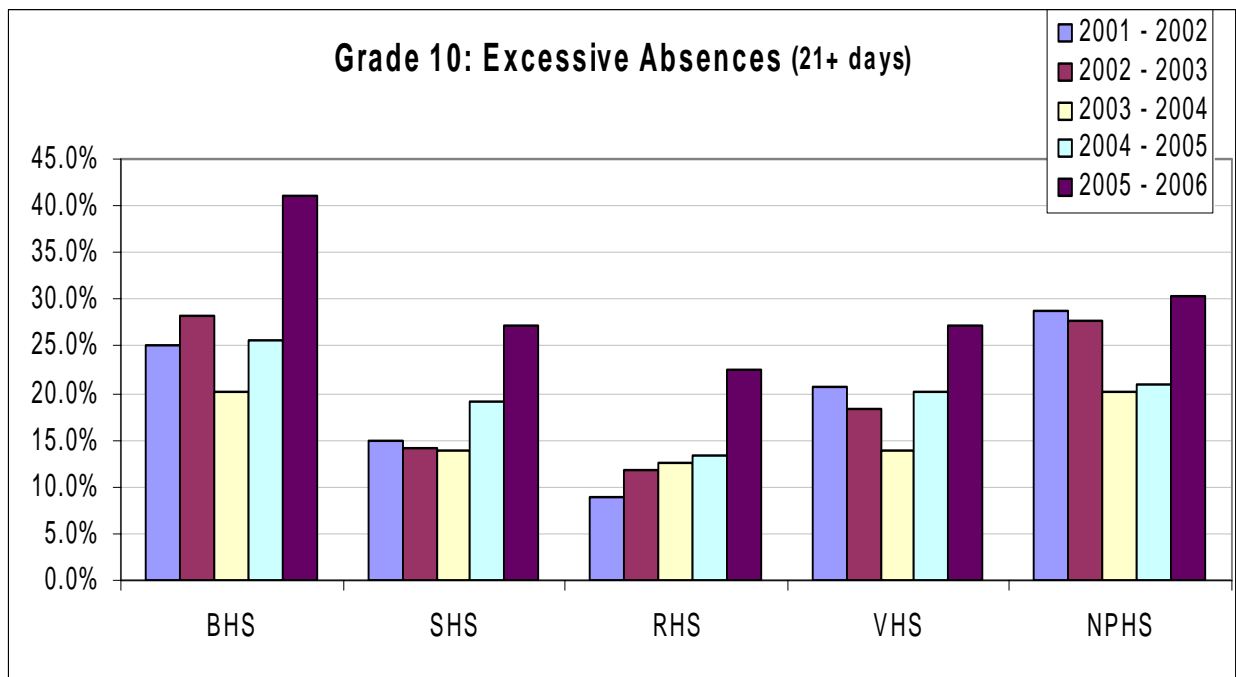


Figure 8B



Student Discipline Referrals, Suspensions, Crime & Violence Data

Figure 9 presents trends in incidents classified by the Florida DOE as *Crime and Violence* (fighting, harassment, theft, disorderly conduct, alcohol, drugs, etc.). All district schools, including North Port present a downward trend between 03-04 and 04-05; North Port and 3 of 4 other high schools showed an increase in 05-06. Reporting of these incidents, however, is inconsistent due to changes in classification and reporting guidelines. North Port presented the opposite trend from other schools in *out-of-school suspensions* through 04-05, but increased in 05-06.

Figure 9

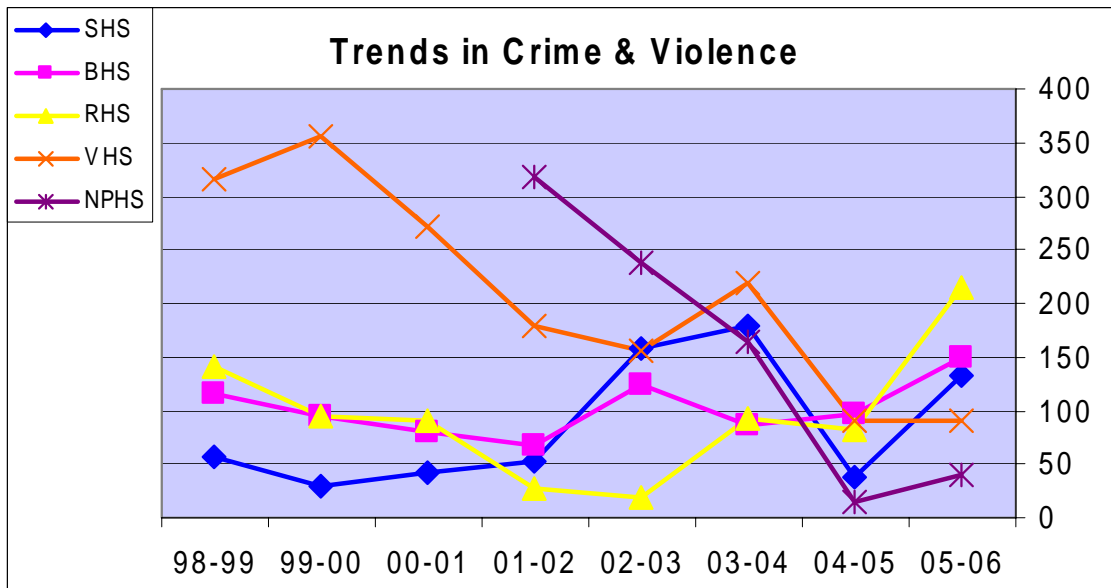
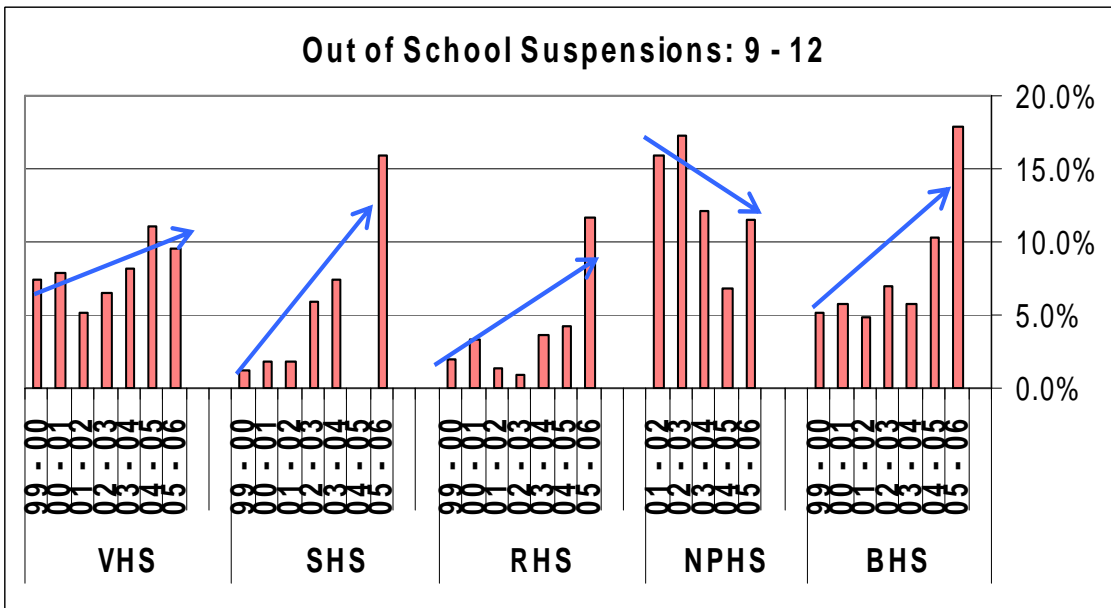


Figure 10



Advanced Course Enrollment and Performance

North Port High has continued to encourage enrollment in honors, Advanced Placement and dual enrollment courses. Figure 11 indicates growth in the dual enrollment program at NPHS, reflecting progress on similar goals at other high schools. Similar progress is evident in AP and Honors courses (Figure 12).

Figure 11

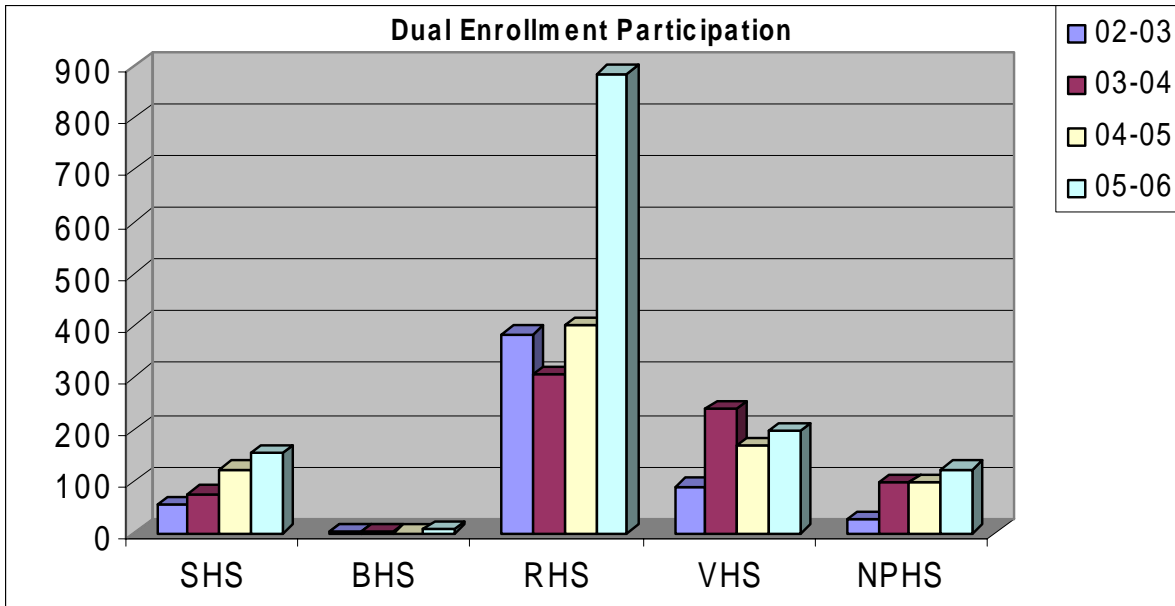
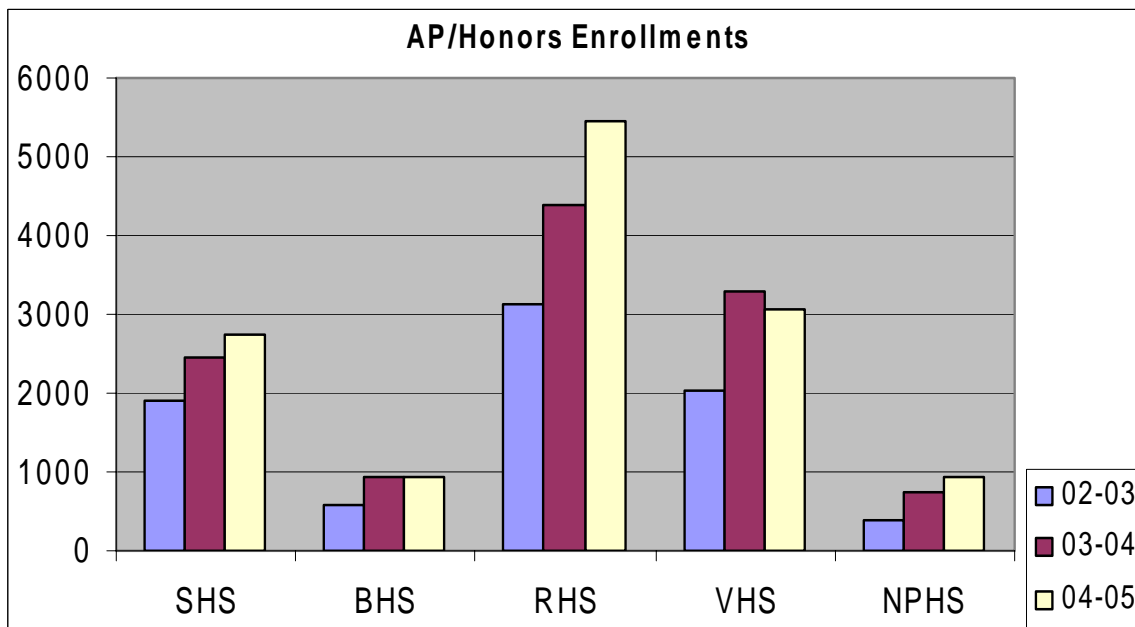


Figure 12



All schools have increased participation in Advanced Placement courses; North Port has increased the exam *success rate* along with increased participation *until 2005-2006*.

Figure 13

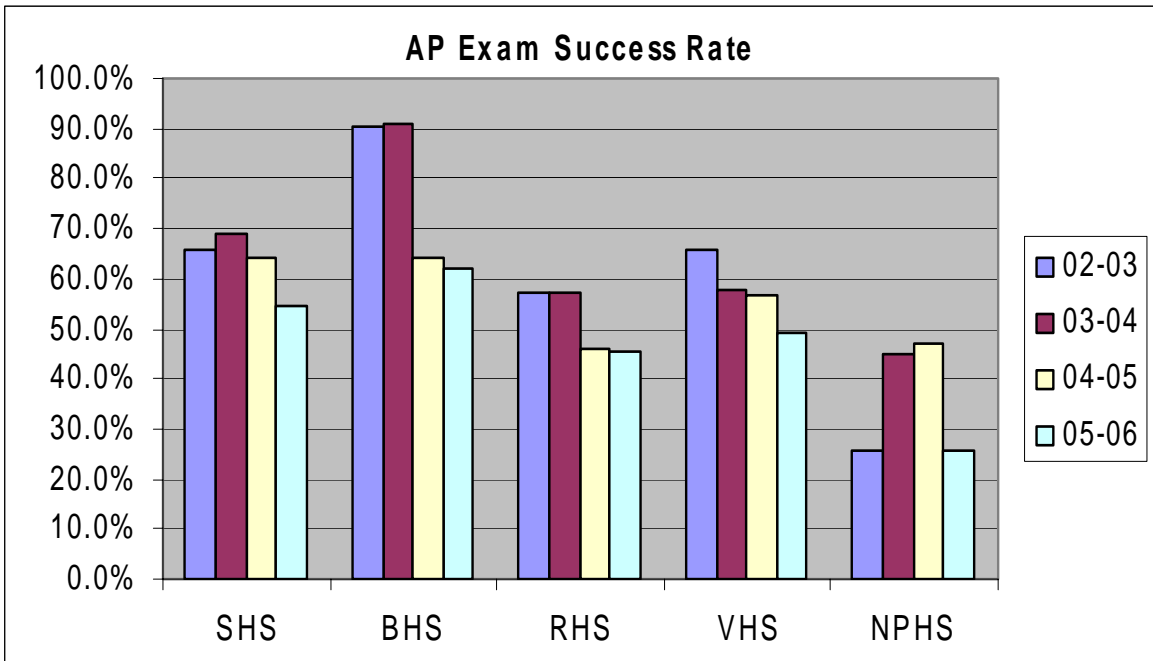
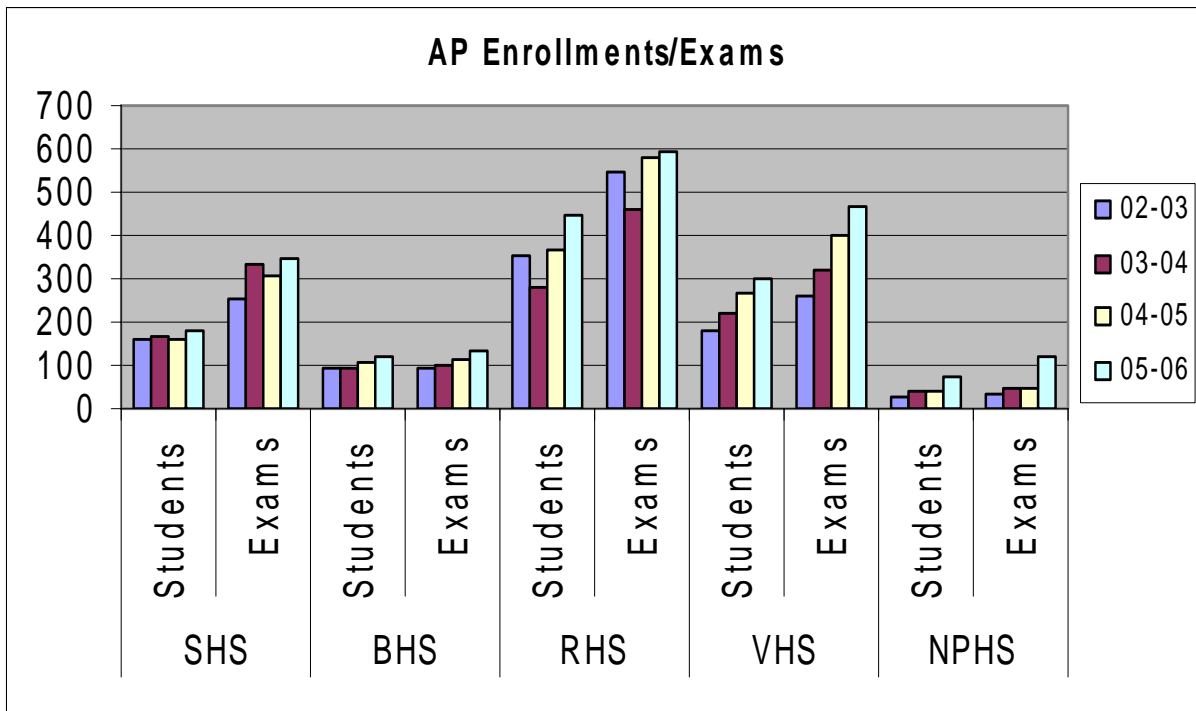


Figure 14



*** Note on data accuracy for attendance and excessive absences:** The evaluator is not confident that the 2005-2006 data on attendance rates and excessive absences are correct. The significant increase in absenteeism and decrease in attendance rates across 5 high schools are unexplained and are consistently changed from the previous year. In the data printout, the numerators and denominators used to calculate the percentages absent (ADA/ADM) are an order of magnitude different from previous years' printouts. As of the report date, the evaluator cannot certify accuracy of these data.

Analysis and Conclusions

This evaluation report is focusing primarily on the second year of implementation, the 2005-2006 school year, but contains some information through February 2007. North Port High has been implementing certain components of smaller learning communities since its opening in the fall of 2001. North Port has participated in many networking activities alongside the Cohort 2 schools as well. It is appropriate, therefore, to examine data from the grant period in the context of trends over the previous 3 years.

In assessing implementation progress, three factors must be addressed: **(1)** North Port High School was designed around a mission closely related to learning communities – that of career academies, **(2)** the smaller learning communities grant program offered an array of enhancements to the original design, and also insured that North Port was fully integrated into the district-wide SLC implementation initiative, and **(3)** during the spring of 2005, the Superintendent of schools began an additional, system-wide initiative entitled NeXt Generation Learning, which includes specific reform initiatives aimed at high schools. Attempts to measure implementation progress must take into consideration the complexities of these changing or evolving expectations. For example, just as North Port was considering a decision of whether to dedicate transition teams to support 9th grade students, essentially creating a separate 9th grade academy, the consulting group supporting NeXt Generation Learning presented a model and research indicating that such structures may not be effective. Additional initiatives and professional development experiences are impinging upon smaller learning community teachers, and all of these initiatives will have to be integrated into the evolving model of an SLC school. An **overall assessment**, taking the point in time of June 2006, would be that implementation progress was on track for **year 2** and that the majority of grant goals were established as a foundation for continued progress.

Student Impact/Learning Outcomes

Observations from student data:

- **FCAT reading** scores at NPHS for grade 9 have improved since 2003; a negative trend, however, is evident for 10th grade reading scores
- **FCAT mathematics** scores at NPHS show no particular trend since 2003 for grades 9 or 10
- **The graduation rate** for NPHS improved greatly between 04-05 and 05-06, after a significant decrease from 03-04 to 04-05; at 86.8%, North Port has the highest graduation rate of the 5 large high schools
- **Attendance rates** at NPHS decreased significantly for all grades in 2005-2006; the number of **excessive absences** in grades 9 & 10 jumped to at or beyond their previously highest levels, reversing a positive trend begun in 2001-2002

- The numbers of school **suspensions** and incidences of **crime & violence** increased significantly for North Port, as well as for 3 of 4 other high schools, reversing a positive trend begun in 2001-2002
- North Port continues to increase enrollments in **Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, and honors** courses; along with increased participation, the success rate on AP exams, however, dropped significantly in 2005-2006, reversing a positive trend evident in the previous three years (joining the other high schools in displaying this negative success trend)

Conclusions

Data for the second year of implementation, supported by recent historical data, indicate an **inconsistent trend in academics**, and an apparently **negative trend in social/behavioral outcomes**, *which is consistent across all five SLC implementation schools*. The continuing positive trend in 9th grade reading scores is notable, but significant numbers of students remain below level 3 in FCAT reading at grades 9 and 10. The improvements in reading performance realized in grade 9 are not maintained (or deteriorate) in grade 10. Course failures remain high as well in grades 9 & 10. Improvements in discipline and attendance, which seemed promising in the first year(s) of implementation, may be indicative of implementation problems or may be responding to non-SLC related factors. The level of implementation of SLC initiatives appeared adequate for year 2 of implementation, at least on the surface. Teachers reported positive progress in structures and mechanisms which are at least indirectly related to improved student learning (e.g., identifying at-risk students, team interventions to support student learning, personalizing the curriculum, professional collaboration). These changes, however, may simply need more time (resulting in more depth in impacting instruction). However, another effect was operating during the 2005-2006 school year (which continued at least part-way through the 2006-2007 school year: The SLC implementation process, county-wide, became entangled in a confusing array of related reform efforts. These “new” reform initiatives were intended to deepen the SLC foundation, with the expressed goal of significantly impacting instruction (i.e., going beyond structural changes and professional collaboration). During 05-06 teachers reported feeling overwhelmed at the number of initiatives, confused about the relationship among the initiatives, and unclear on goals and priorities. This ongoing situation produced resentment and hardened any resistance which was present or dormant related to the SLC components. With the superintendent’s tentative resignation announcement (September 2006), teachers and administrators became concerned about the future of the reform efforts. (The superintendent has since decided to stay and has a new contract with the board of education.)

Challenges and Recommendations

The administration and faculty at NPHS continue to examine and integrate various initiatives in order to create a coherent model of Smaller Learning Communities. These multiple initiatives have the potential of being viewed as separate, unrelated components. In a focus group held in February 2007 with the North Port Academy Leaders, teachers continued to point to positive indicators of the SLC model as better understanding and integration were realized. The school as well as the district must continue to identify the critical changes and strategies that have the potential of impacting student learning. The superintendent and district staff, with the assistance of a consulting group, are attempting to communicate and support a single (yet complex) reform

model. Leadership from the principal as well as faculty collaboration appears to be strong forces in creating a viable model of school improvement on the North Port campus. Continued examination of the SLC initiatives, including purposeful data collection and reflection, will be necessary to determine the most effective structures and practices for this campus. Pursuing stronger relationships with community and parents, as well as student input and advocacy, will assist in this process.

> END OF REPORT