

**D R A F T x/xx/06**

***Smaller Learning Communities:  
Implementation Grant***

***School Board of Sarasota County, Florida***

***Year 4 Evaluation Report- Final  
July 2006***

***[Reporting period Aug. 2002 – June 2006]***

Submitted by

George Reid, Ph.D.



**Performance Design Group.**

**PO Box 2399**

**Sarasota, FL 34230**

**941-365-2117**

**941-362-9271(fax)**

**email: [performgrp@comcast.net](mailto:performgrp@comcast.net)**

**Web: [www.performgrp.com](http://www.performgrp.com)**

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**Introduction**

For several years, Sarasota County's high schools have been developing and implementing research based programs with alternative schedules and structures, along with an expanding focus on career education. In 2000 - 2001, a Smaller Learning Communities **planning grant** of \$200,000 allowed the district to create a unified plan for engaging high school stakeholders in dialogue regarding reform focused on ensuring all students meet high standards in a more personalized learning environment. Each district high school had implemented at least one program innovation, such as block scheduling, career academies, a 9<sup>th</sup> grade academy, magnet programs, and community service/internship programs. The creation of small learning communities was viewed as a powerful strategy for more effectively meeting the needs of all students, dramatically improving the high schools' productivity as reflected by graduation rates and rates of college enrollment, and maintaining the district's reputation for academic, athletic and cultural excellence. The effort to redesign high schools required extensive commitment to professional development and community education. In 2002 - 2003, Sarasota County applied for and received a \$1,381,000 **implementation grant** to support a 3-year plan to develop smaller learning communities in four high schools: Booker High, Riverview High, Sarasota High, and Venice High. In the spring of 2005, the district received permission for a **no-cost extension** of the grant through June 2006. (By the end of the 2004 – 2005 school year, approximately \$500,000 remained in the grant budget.)

Enrollments in Sarasota County's large high schools range from 1500 to over 2500 students. Numerous studies have demonstrated the impersonal nature of larger schools, where students often feel alienated and disconnected. Problems associated with large student populations include increased incidents of crime or violence, increased student absences, high academic failure rates – especially among freshmen, and low graduation rates. Historical data demonstrated a clear need for restructuring Sarasota's high schools through strategies that create smaller learning communities.

During the 2000-2001 school year, a district steering committee and individual school task forces involved a wide range of school (teachers, counselors, administrators) and community stakeholders in developing a comprehensive implementation plan. These task forces conducted extensive research, including visits to and from exemplary schools around the country, as a foundation for Sarasota County's model and proposed plan. Consultants from the Small Schools Workshop/University of Illinois facilitated consensus building and provided professional development. With the focus of a shared district vision, each school developed an implementation model to meet the unique needs of that campus as a part of the overall plan.

A comprehensive evaluation plan was implemented to monitor progress over the three-year implementation. Anticipated positive benefits include: improved performance in **reading, writing, and mathematics** sections of the FCAT; improved performance on the **SAT and ACT** examinations; an increase in the number of students taking **dual enrollment and/or Advanced Placement** courses; an increase in the number of students **completing high school** with a standard diploma; an increase in the number of students involved in **extracurricular activities**; a decrease in the number of incidents of student **violence, suspensions and expulsions** and in **alcohol and drug use**; an increase in average daily **attendance**. It is also anticipated that the evaluation will depict significant progress in closing the gap in academic achievement between socio-economic groups at the high school level.

The implementation process outlined in this proposal includes a combination of strategies aimed at creating dynamic, personalized, engaging, and productive learning environments. Strategies common across all schools include: (1) **9<sup>th</sup> grade transition communities**, (2) **vertical learning communities or career academies in grades 10 – 12**, (3) expanded **advising/guidance/mentoring**, (4) **flexible or block scheduling**, (5) **four-year career/academic plans** beginning in middle school and (6) expanded **job shadowing, internships, and community service**. (excerpts from grant abstract)

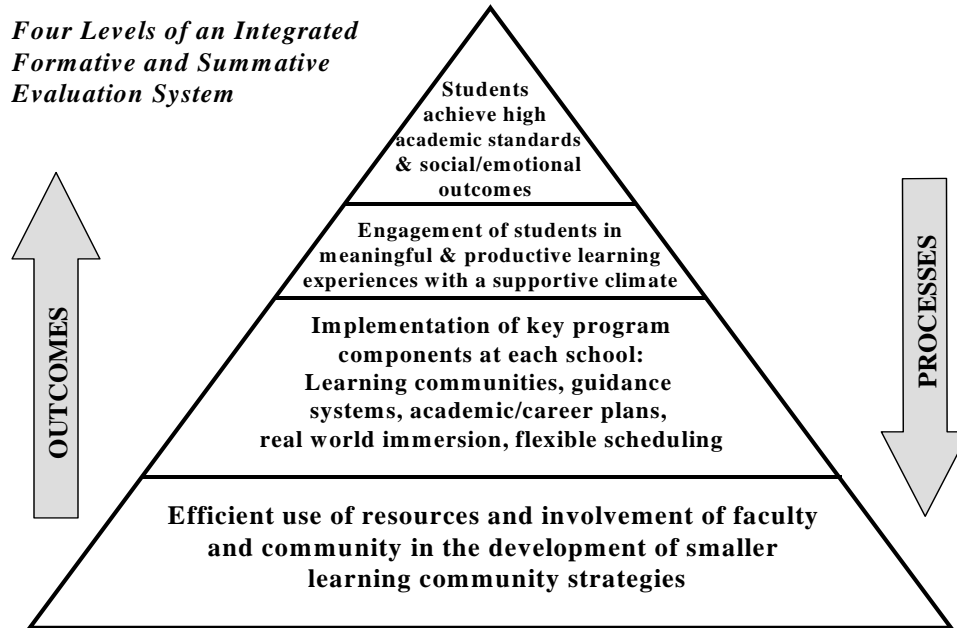
### **Evaluation Plan**

The evaluation incorporates both formative and summative evaluation approaches. Summative evaluation will address the overall impacts and outcomes of the project, while formative evaluation will focus on levels and quality of implementation, along with progress indicators. Progress evaluation is guided by the project timetable and schedule of deliverables/milestones, as detailed in the Management Matrix from the grant application.

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 CBAM Stages of Concern and Levels of Use of Innovation models, with an emphasis on level of implementation of key program components. The evaluation process examines not only outcomes and processes, but attempts to associate hierarchical levels of the project, as outlined in the figure below. Program components and inputs are illustrative and not a comprehensive listing.

## Evaluation Design

**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 the Baseline Data section of **Appendix 1**. Outcome data will be referenced to a 3-year baseline, covering years 1998-99, 1999-2000, and 2000-2001. Trends in student outcomes will be tracked forward into 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006.

Data elements from the U.S. Department of Education *Annual Performance Report* guides data collection and reporting for individual schools in the SLC. These reports were prepared and submitted as of June 30<sup>th</sup> 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 in the Baseline Data section, except for dual enrollment courses (generating high school and college credit) and extracurricular involvement. These measures are currently being developed and will be part of the data collection system beginning with 2000-20001. 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/nclbspar/index.cfm>.

Dr. George Reid of the *Performance Design Group* was contracted to manage the evaluation process. The evaluator was responsible for communicating the evaluation design to project staff and insuring that data collection tasks are accomplished according to schedule. The evaluator communicated frequently with the Principal Investigator and school director to monitor the implementation process and provide formative evaluation feedback on products and processes. The evaluator also is responsible for developing several rubrics and/or evaluation instruments for formative and summative evaluation throughout the project.

**Table 1. Evaluation Questions/Ongoing Performance Measures**

<b>Summative Evaluation Question Areas</b>	<b>Data Source/Instrument</b>	<b>Schedule/Responsibility</b>
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/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: 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 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: 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 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 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 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: J2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 Research/Assessment Dept./ evaluation consultant
5. Number of students involved in extracurricular activities	School-based data collection system was created during 2000-2001 for uniform data reporting on this measure	Project Manager/evaluation consultant Spring of 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006
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: 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 Research/Assessment Dept./ evaluation consultant
7. Reported average daily attendance	Attendance reporting is part of district MIS reporting system and is uniformly reported to State DOE	Data available October each year: 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 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: J2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 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 manager and school coordinators; collaboration with IRRE
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 manager and school coordinators; climate survey
* Specific data will be collected for 9 <sup>th</sup> graders in the above goal areas to evaluate the impact of 9 <sup>th</sup> grade transition communities	Disaggregated data from above areas	Evaluation consultant in cooperation with school coordinators and Research & Evaluation Department

**Table 2. Formative/Process Evaluation Measures: Level of Implementation**

<b>Formative/Process Evaluation Question Areas</b>	<b>Data Source/Instrument</b>	<b>Schedule/Responsibility</b>
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 Manager, evaluation consultant, school principals, School Director of Secondary Schools, Executive Director of Workforce Development Quarterly/Annual review Spring 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006
2. Implementation of key components at each school: 9 <sup>th</sup> grade transition, vertical communities, 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 manager, school principals. Quarterly data collection with annual review Spring 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006
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 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006

## **Methodology**

The evaluator has been associated with the SLC project since the 2000-2001 school year, assisting with preparation of the Implementation Grant and evaluation design for that grant. Upon receiving the Implementation Grant award, the evaluator has been in close collaboration with the project managers as well as district administration, and has served as an observing member of the District Steering Committee for SLCs. Throughout the 4 years of the project, the evaluator attended SLC coordinator meetings, observed a sampling of training sessions, and provided feedback to various consulting groups who have interacted with the schools and project management staff. Throughout the life of the project, the evaluator provided informal feedback to school and district administrative staff. At least once yearly, the evaluator provided a more formal set of analyses and findings to the School Board and administrative staff. conducted 3 site visits to the Clark Learning Center on the IRCC campus in Stuart, Florida: October 2005, December 2005, and May 2006. Throughout the project year, the evaluator communicated via e-mail and phone to the school director, principal investigator, and occasionally with the teaching staff. The evaluator was included in the e-mailing list for project activities. In addition, a communication link was established with the IRCC provost's office to arrange for data reports specified in the Data Source table of the design. During campus visits and in the interim, via e-mail and phone calls, the evaluator met with Maria Mosley, Executive Director of CALC; Diana Rew, Principal Investigator through December 2005; Mark Thompson, current Principal Investigator; and Patty Winterburn, Provost/IRCC.

### **Data Sources for Report**

- **October 2005 Site Visit:** Met with PI and Executive Director to review grant and coordinate evaluation design with project design and timetable. Assisted PI in detailing evaluation and monitoring activities associated with Goals and Deliverables Action Plan. Met for several hours with project teachers to review plans and products and to review data collection needs for formative and summative evaluation. Observed planning workshop for year's events conducted by PI and Executive Director.
- **December 2005 Site Visit:** Observed work and planning session with project staff. Reviewed evaluation timeline; developed and shared instructional product formative evaluation rubric for future use by staff; observed work session to develop student rubrics, pre-test and integrated lesson planning. Planned for data collection and future visits. Discussed search for new PI with Executive Director
- **March 2006:** Conference call with newly appointed Principal Investigator and Executive Director. Reviewed planning and evaluation tools. Discussed future site visit.

- **May 2006 Site Visit:** Attended formal review of year's activities presented by Director, PI, faculty, students, and IRCC representatives. Met with IRCC Provost to review baseline data. Met with PI to assemble sample products and events portfolio.
  
- **Products and events portfolio:** (August 2005 – May 2006)
  
- **School and student data:** Date printouts, electronic and Web-based data elements from IRCC, CALC, and Florida Department of Education/NCLB data elements
  
- **Communications:** Primarily e-mails from and among project staff detailing events, data, meetings minutes, and summary documents.

