USF

UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH FLORIDA

Review of

The Pinellas County School Board's

Dropout Prevention Services

Executive Summary

February 1, 2006

Executive Summary

Review of

Pinellas County School Board's Dropout Prevention Services

February 2006

A review of the Dropout Prevention (DOP) services provided by the various programs and services offered by the Pinellas County School Board (PCSB) was conducted in the Fall of 2005. This review is intended to provide PCSB with information about programs' effectiveness in order to guide future decisions regarding adjustments to the programs and services offered by the Dropout Prevention office.

The Center for Research, Evaluation, Assessment and Measurement (CREAM) at the University of South Florida developed a plan to conduct this evaluation of DOP services using a macro and micro approach. When data were available, analyses were conducted using four year's worth of information in order to examine potential trends and changes across time relative to the goals of the evaluation. The evaluation sought to identify the degree to which the programs are meeting their stated goals and objectives, including specific population(s) served. It also strove to gather information regarding potential redundancies across individual programs as well as issues associated with the ability to determine if the programs are operating efficiently and as expected. Potential limitations that resulted from issues inherent in a review such as this include the vast diversity of services and programs offered by the district in a multitude of contexts with diverse student groups.

This report is a summary of the characteristics of the programs, the data used in the evaluation, the analyses employed and the findings. A full report with extensive information on all aspects of the evaluation, including detailed findings and results is available, dated 1 Feb 2006. The full report is available from the Department of Research and Accountability, PCSB.

There are six indicators (attendance, FCAT, entry/reentry, low grade, over age, and suspensions/expulsions) that are used to identify students at risk for dropping out. An analysis of a report listing students with two or more of these indicators revealed that there are many students in need of DOP services in Pinellas County Schools. Specifically, in Elementary Schools the attendance and low grade indicators were most frequently cited. The indicators most frequently cited for Middle Schools were suspensions/expulsions and attendance. High Schools exhibited the most students with indicators, compared to Elementary Schools and Middle Schools. There were over 4,000 students with a low grade indicator and over 2,000 students with the suspensions/expulsions indicator in High Schools.

All of the program categories (educational alternatives, teenage parent, disciplinary, juvenile justice and other) present program goals that are well aligned with the District Vision and Mission (72.7% to 100.0% alignment).

Educational Alternative Programs. These programs provide a different curriculum, setting, and/or resources to students who are having academic difficulty. Services are provided to students in grades 3 to 12 within a traditional school settings or alternative facilities.

- *Student demographics*: Programs are serving students similar to the district in regards to gender, ethnicity (except *Project SUCCESS* with a higher proportion of Black (Non-Hispanic) students), LEP, and special education. However, programs are serving a larger proportion of free/reduced lunch status students than the district. All of the currently open programs, except *HSEA*, served greater than 50% free/reduced students (across all four years).

- *Number of students served*: The programs with the greatest number of students served and attendance are *HSEA, MSAP, STARS*, and *Intermediate* with students served ranging from just under 1,000 to over 2,500. Other programs in this category served fewer than 100 students across all four years (except *Challenge* in 2000-2001).

- *Average number of student referrals*: Three programs had consistently higher average numbers of student referrals; *MSAP, HSEA* and *Juvenile Services* (ranging from 4.04 to 6.06). Two programs exhibited a declining trend in average number of student referrals; Intermediate Schools (4.48 to 2.08) and *Challenge* (1.39 to 0).

- *Achievement.* Overall across the four years the students in these programs decreased in the percentage Level 3 or higher on the Math FCAT (23.1 to 17) and the reading FCAT percentage Level 3 or higher increased slightly (27.5 to 28.5). The *STARS* program students had a slight increase in percentage Level 3 or greater on both the Reading FCAT (25.32 to 37.5) and the Math FCAT (18.8 to 22.9). The *MSAP* program students had a decrease in percentage Level 3 or greater on both the Reading FCAT (40.22 to 29.41) and the Math FCAT (28.3 to 9.7).

- *Budget.* Compared to all the other DOP program categories with budgets just over $5,000,000 this category has the greatest cost, ranging from over $15,000,000 to $20,000,000 across the four years. The two less expensive programs in this category are *HSEA* and *MSAP* with average cost per student per day ranging from $14.87 to $19.42. The two more expensive programs in this category are *BETA* and *Intermediate* with average cost per student per day ranging from $22.64 to $49.99.

Teenage Parenting Programs. The goal of these programs is to continue the education of students who are pregnant and/or parents.

- *Student demographics:* Compared to the District, the programs are serving smaller portions of male students, White (Non-Hispanic), and LEP. They are serving similar portions of special education students. However, these programs are serving a larger portion of Black (Non-Hispanic), and free/reduced lunch status students (especially APPS South and Harris TIPS).

- *Number of students served:* The *Pinellas Teen Parenting PTEC* program served the most students (between 800 and 900 students across all four years). The other three programs (*APPS North, APPS South*, and *Harris TIPS Teenparent*) served under 300 students.

- *Average number of student referrals:* The program with the highest average number of referrals over the four years was *APPS South* (ranging from 0.81 to 3.52).

- *Achievement.* The number of students with achievement data for the programs is very small and irregular, so it is difficult to make summary statements. The largest sample size for one year was 35.

- *Budget.* The least expensive program in this category is *Teenparent PK* with average cost per student per day ranging from $14.09 to $17.50 across the four years. The other two programs have increasing average cost per student per day over the four years; *Harris TIPS Teenparent* $27.97 (2000-2001) to $63.07 (2003-2004), *AAPS North/South* $20.49 (2000-2001) to $33.18 (2003-2004).

<u>Disciplinary Programs</u>. Students participating in these programs were identified as having behavior problems (expelled, reassignment recommended, violating PCSB policy, etc.). The programs provide a curriculum that includes academic and social skills in a variety of settings.

- *Student demographics*: Compared to the district, these programs are serving greater proportions of male, Black (Non-Hispanic), special education, and free/reduced lunch status students. Both *North Ward Secondary* and *DELTA* have consistently (over the four years) served greater portions of Black (Non-Hispanic) students. Regarding special education students, *North Ward Secondary* and *PTEC South Secondary* have consistently (over the four years) served a greater proportion of students than the District. Greater portions of free/reduced lunch students were served across the four years by *North Ward Secondary* and *DELTA*.

- *Number of students served:* The majority of the programs served 150 to 350 students across the four years. One exception was the *DELTA* program which served under 50 students.

- *Average number of student referrals:* The programs with the highest average number of referrals across all four years were *North Ward Secondary* and *Safety Harbor Secondary* (ranging from 13.38 to 16.69). The average number of referrals for *PTEC South Secondary* declined across the four years from 11.09 to 7.69.

- *Achievement.* Overall these programs had a slight decrease in the percentage of students Level 3 or greater on the Reading FCAT (34.5 to 29.2) and had similar percentages on the Math FCAT (38.7 to 38.5) across the four years. The number of students with achievement data for the individual programs is very small and irregular, so it is difficult to make summary statements. All sample sizes were under 30.

- *Budget.* The least expensive program in this category is *Teleschool* with average cost per student per day ranging from $17.39 to $26.74 across the four years. Regarding the average cost per student per day, the three most expensive programs in 2003-2004 were *PTEC South Secondary* ($172.81), *Safety Harbor Secondary* ($124.43), and *DELTA* ($103.34).

Juvenile Justice Programs. These programs provide services to students who have been court ordered to participate through a cooperative agreement with the Department of Juvenile Justice. The goals of these programs include returning the student to a traditional education, awarding of high school diploma, and decline in criminal behavior.

- *Student demographics:* The majority of programs that remain open are serving a larger portion of males, Black (Non-Hispanic) and special education students than the District is serving. *County Jail, Pinellas Treatment Center,* and *Eckerd Academy* served greater than 50% Black (Non-Hispanic) across all four years. *Pinellas Treatment Center* and *Eckerd Youth Challenge* served greater than 50% special education students across all four years. Similar or smaller portions of LEP and free/reduced lunch status students were served by these programs as compared to the District.

- *Number of students served:* The program serving the most students across all four years was *Juv Detention Center* with over 3,000 served. All the other programs served under 500 students, except *Eckerd Wilderness Camp* with just under 1,000 served.

- *Average number of student referrals:* The program with the highest average number of referrals was *Juv Detention Center* (ranging from 7.69 to 11.55). The other programs had relatively low average number of student referrals, ranging from 0 to 6.15.

- *Achievement.* Overall these programs had a slight decrease in the percentage of students Level 3 or greater on the both the Reading FCAT (18.2 to 12.5) and the Math FCAT (14.6 to 11.1) across the four years. *Eckerd Wilderness Camp* had an increase in the percentage of students Level 3 or higher on the Reading FCAT (26.1 to 50) and a decrease in the percentage of students Level 3 or higher on the Math FCAT (18.4 to 15.5).

- *Budget.* The least expensive program in this category is *County Jail* with an average cost per student per day ranging from $9.79 to $16.55 across the four years. The

most expensive program in this category is *Eckerd Wilderness Camp* with an average cost per student per day ranging from $35.92 to $41.84.

Miscellaneous Programs. These programs include a substance abuse program, homeless program, transitional guardian care program, truancy program and tutoring program.

- *Student demographics*: The substance abuse program *Operation PAR* served a greater portion of males and White (Non-Hispanic) students when compared to the District portions served. *Operation PAR* served very few LEP students and a similar or smaller portion of special education and free/reduced lunch students.

- *Number of students served: Operation PAR* served just under 100 to 150 students across the four years.

- *Average number of student referrals*: The average number of student referrals for *Operation PAR* across the four years declined from 5.53 to 3.81.

- *Achievement.* The number of students with achievement data for the *Operation PAR* program was very small and irregular, so it is difficult to make summary statements.

- *Budget.* The average cost per student per day for the *Operation PAR* program ranged from $12.30 to $37.17 across the four years.

Limitations

There were some evaluation questions that were unable to be addressed in this report due to lack of appropriate and sufficient unavailable data. One such question regarded the length of waiting lists for programs and whether the waiting lists have changed over time. Information regarding waiting lists was not provided. Although this information may be available at the school level it was not available in an electronic form for analysis across programs and across time.

Some data sources did not have information for all of the DOP programs. The data sources table in Appendix A provides a good picture of this issue. For example the educational alternatives program *BETA* had data available in the electronic files but was not discussed in the "DOP Services Referral Guide". Another example is for the *Intermediate* Schools (Lealman and Clearwater) the electronic data is collected separately for each school but the budget data was provided for the two schools together. Conversely, the High School Ed Alternatives programs (TEAM and SVEC-TEAC) have data collected together but are written up separately in the "DOP Services Referral Guide" and have separate budget information.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Most programs do appear to be serving the students that they are intended to serve although in some cases the proportion of students from a specific population tend to be overrepresented relative to the overall population of district students. For example, a greater proportion of free/reduced lunch status students are enrolled in Educational Alternatives programs relative to the proportion of special needs students throughout the district. In addition, a greater proportion of special education students are enrolled in Discipline and Juvenile Justice programs relative to the proportion of special education students throughout the district. The representation of Black students in DOP programs is overwhelmingly higher proportionally than in the district. For all

four years of the study, the proportion of Black students across the district was approximately 19%. However, they accounted for a much greater portion of students in all areas of the DOP programs across the years, including over 30% in many of the *Educational Alternatives* programs, over 40% in many of the *Juvenile Justice* programs, up to 72% in specific *Discipline* programs, and up to 65% in specific *Teen Parenting* programs.

The disparity of information available for each program hinders the ability to clearly state whether a program is meeting its intended goals and objectives. Many of the programs cite achievement as a reason for a student to be enrolled in specific DOP programs as well as successful graduation. However, the limited amount of FCAT data does not permit clear inferences regarding student success during or after their participation in a DOP intervention. The data that were available do not seem to suggest a noticeable overall positive impact on achievement as measured by the FCAT. Furthermore, information regarding graduation rates was not available in the data so there was no ability to provide information about the success of students' in DOP programs to complete their K-12 academic career.

Additionally, it is unclear if the accuracy of the budget data is similar for all programs. Based on the data received in support of this evaluation, it does appear that some programs are notably more costly than others. Programs conducted in the *Disciplinary Programs* category tended to be the most expensive (based on cost per student per day), specifically the *DELTA, Safety Harbor Secondary* and *North Ward Secondary* programs, at approximately $100 or more per student per day. In the *Educational Alternatives* category, the *BETA* program and the two *Intermediate* schools (*Lealman* and *Clearwater*) were the most costly, averaging just under $50 per student per day over the last three years.

Consideration of the number of programs that fall within the Disciplinary Programs category as well as the Educational Alternatives category should be tempered with the realization that two large programs/schools, *Bayside High* and the *Oak Park* school, have been activated recently and were not included in this evaluation with the exception of the content analysis based on the Dropout Prevention Services Referral Guide August 2004. Both programs are intended to serve larger populations (500 or more) than those currently being served by some of the other programs and, based on the descriptions in the Dropout Prevention Services Referral Guide August 2004, have at least some characteristics in common with those programs. A careful review of the types of students these two newer programs are serving relative to those being served in some of those that have been in place for a few years but serve a smaller population should be conducted by experts to determine redundancy across the programs in services offered. School district leaders and administrators may wish to consider possible restructuring and/or merging of programs to take advantage of similar services offered by more than one program at similar grade levels.

Additional issues, including fidelity of implementation concerns (from the administrator interviews) should also be taken into account. Although the costs of these programs may be somewhat more difficult to accurately ascertain due to their immersion in regular schools (e.g., *MSAP*), adjustments to implementation procedures at the sites may be revisited to ensure effective use of resources.

A more stringent review of the DOP programs would benefit from adjustments to the data collection processes and procedures. The following are just a few recommendations for data collection to help inform future evaluations and decision-making:

- More efficient and comprehensive method of tracking budget information by program
- Save electronic files of students identified as at risk (SD 410 report). If these data were available electronically students could be matched to services being provided, (i.e. we could tell how many identified at risk students were in DOP programs and for how long).
- Collect capacity and waiting list info electronically.
- Track and collect graduation rates for DOP students.
- Review consistency with data code names and names of programs.
- Maintain measures of fidelity of the programs and review periodically to ensure decentralized programs are complying with the program intent and are implementing and maintaining DOP programs appropriately.
- Conduct periodic reviews (annual) of the DOP programs to monitor progress longitudinally and to enable identification of both positive and negative trends in a timely fashion.

This review was developed by CREAM in support of Pinellas School District. Questions, comments, or concerns about this report and the initial analysis and findings should be directed to Ms. Gianna Rendina-Gobioff, (813)974-1162, fax (813)974-4495 grendina@tempest.coedu.usf.edu. or Dr. Melinda Hess (813)974-7668, fax (813)974-4495, mhess@tempest.coedu.usf.edu