



Our community focused on our future

School Dropout Study Group Report

Spring 2003

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study considers what the community can do to increase the proportion of Sarasota County youth who complete their high school education, either traditional high school or an alternative, that supports their goals. The report focuses on the public school system and examines school dropout at the district level. It explores:

- The extent to which Sarasota County youth are not completing high school
- The impact of school dropout on individuals and the community
- Who drops out of school and why
- The roles of public and private organizations, and how they coordinate their efforts

- Current dropout prevention efforts
- Barriers to improving high school completion rates
- Successful dropout prevention strategies locally and in other communities

Time constraints prohibited detailed examination of curriculum, instruction, exceptional student education, and funding for the public schools. Private school issues were not examined. This study examines the contributing factors, current efforts, barriers, and approaches for reducing school drop out and improving high school completion. It does not provide an exhaustive evaluation of these issues.

HIGHLIGHTS

Major Problems

- Parental involvement in children's education is important at all levels of education, yet there are few successful programs to engage parents beyond elementary school.
- At-risk students often lack a caring, supportive role model to encourage them to achieve academic, personal, and career goals.
- There are children who enter school unprepared to learn, and not all preschool, or childcare providers prepare children for school.
- Current programs and resources for at-risk youth are not fully utilized, in part due to the need for more coordination and collaboration within the district and between community organizations and schools.
- Many public school students are not on grade-level in basic academic skills beginning in early grades and persisting through high school.
- The ability for students to relate what they learn to their work and educational goals impacts their decision to complete high school, yet the current curriculum provides few options for students who do not plan to attend college.

Recommended Solutions

- Develop community-wide strategies that maximize current efforts for:
 - Engaging parents, especially those who are not typically involved, in all levels of their children's education.
 - Engaging the community in mentoring and tutoring programs for at-risk youth.
 - Ensuring high quality, accessible, affordable pre-school and child care programs.
- Appoint an administrator to facilitate a district-wide plan to reduce school dropout and improve coordination among schools and community organizations.
- Enhance the Academic Improvement Plan (AIP) process so that each student who is performing below grade level receives comprehensive interventions and is assigned an advocate who will ensure the plan is executed.
- Vocational technical programs should be easily accessible by all high school students and middle and high schools should expand the use of career and vocational exploration, individualized instruction and applied learning concepts.
- Each district high school should provide alternative education modeled after successful programs.

Message from Chair & Executive Director

“In the arena of human life, the honors and rewards fall to those who show their good qualities in action.” – Aristotle

Between 1997 and 2001, almost one in seven students dropped out of Sarasota County public high schools. That’s over 1,600 students—enough to fill an entire middle school! Why are these numbers so important? Because they affect the quality of our community’s workforce. Because in Sarasota County, school dropouts are eight times more likely to be receiving public assistance and earn approximately \$24,000 less each year than high school graduates.

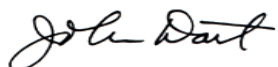
Historically, in our community, the issue of school dropout has not been a high profile concern. However, in January and February of 2002, the residents of Sarasota County told SCOPE they wanted to study school dropout and find solutions to better meet our students’ needs. Volunteers met weekly for six months, hearing from resource people, gathering facts, and coming up with ideas to solve some of the problems they uncovered.

This year, in addition to the facts, Study Group members heard from people living *with* the issues through their personal stories. Known as **The Stories Project**, this new documentary venture aims to capture the human face behind the facts. Throughout this report, you will find excerpts from the School Dropout documentary.

As SCOPE begins the implementation phase of this study, it will use these documentaries to help raise public awareness of the issue of school dropout. With many initiatives already underway to improve the graduation rate in Sarasota County, SCOPE is confident its volunteers will find many partners in their quest for positive change.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank those Study Group members, resource people, and community leaders who contributed to the School Dropout study. Your efforts have brought SCOPE a step closer to achieving its mission of engaging community members like you in raising the standard of living for all in Sarasota County.

Sincerely,



John Dart
Chair, Board of Directors



Tim Dutton
Executive Director

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FOREWORD

School dropout is a complex, multifaceted problem and the decision to drop out of school is a process, not an event. Contributing factors can be student-related, family-related, community-related, or school-related. While there are many risk factors that indicate the potential to dropout, the presence of these factors or combinations of these factors do not necessarily mean that a student will drop out. In fact, the data show that many dropouts do not come from groups typically thought of as at-risk. For purposes of this report, the term “at-risk” is used in a general way to refer to students who exhibit patterns of behavior and characteristics reflective of indicators and correlates of dropping out of school.

There is confusion on the part of the public about the extent of the dropout problem, and the calculations for dropout and graduation rates are complex and difficult to understand. While the study explored the numbers in depth, the focus was on understanding why students drop out and what can be done to keep them in school. It became clear to the Study Group that regardless of the final count, school dropout is a major problem that deserves community attention.

Sarasota County is fortunate to have strong community support for education, but in the past school drop out has not been a priority concern. There is evidence that this is changing and there are a number of efforts on the part of the school system at the state and local levels as well as a number of community organizations. For example, the State of Florida has increased academic standards and is holding schools more accountable for the performance of students. The Sarasota County School District is undertaking a high school reform initiative over the next three years, known as “Smaller Learning Communities.” The goals of this effort address many of the characteristics of large high schools that lead students to disengage and, in some cases, eventually drop out. During the course of this study, the school district has also taken steps toward a district-wide approach to addressing school dropout and has budgeted for a position that will coordinate school dropout prevention efforts for the district.

While many of the recommended solutions in this report are directed to, or involve the school district, the Study Group recognizes that schools cannot solve the dropout problem alone. It is a problem that requires multiple strategies that involve the entire community. It is important that the community work in partnership with schools to ensure that there are adequate resources and community support systems that encourage youth to complete their high school education.

STUDY GROUP MEMBERS

Study Group members met 21 times from October to March. In addition, the Process Team met several times to provide guidance and direction for the study. The committee received information from knowledgeable resource people and published information researched by SCOPE staff.

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FINDINGS

Findings represent the information received by the Study Group. They are derived from published materials, from facts reported by resource people, and from a consensus of the Study Group's understanding of the opinions of resource people.

INTRODUCTION

Society's expectation that youth will complete their high school education has grown over time. In 1990, the U.S. Department of Education established a goal for high school completion as a 90% graduation rate. In 1990, 86% of 18- to 24-year-olds had completed a high school credential; the high school completion rates have remained stable during the 1990's. The National Center for Education Statistics estimates that in October 2000, there were 3.8 million 16 to 24 year olds that were not enrolled in a high school program and had not completed high school. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that in 2000, there were 33,164 individuals, or 12.9% of the Sarasota County population, aged 25 and older who did not hold a high school diploma or its equivalent.

During the four-year period of 1997 – 2001 more than 1,600 hundred students dropped out of Sarasota County public high schools, a 14.5 % four-year dropout rate, and 70.3% of students graduated from public high schools in 2001. The Sarasota County School District performs better than the state of Florida as a whole on most measures of educational effectiveness, including dropout and graduation rates. However, estimates of the State of Florida's graduation rate ranking place it in the lower 10% of states (45th – 49th depending on the source).

The personal and social cost to a community of school drop out is in terms of reduced earnings for the individual, reduced tax revenues and increased costs associated with unemployment, crime and dependency on assistance programs. The state of Florida projects that on a statewide basis, increasing the status of dropouts to high school graduates or the equivalent would result in \$2.3 billion of additional annual federal tax revenue and \$768.8 million in annual state sales taxes. Furthermore, in today's business environment a primary concern is skilled personnel and the availability of a viable workforce, both today and in the future, can play a role in business decisions to expand and/or locate in this community.

UNDERSTANDING THE DROPOUT PROBLEM

Dropout and Graduation Rates

In Florida, a dropout is defined as a student who withdraws from school for any of several reasons cited in statute. The dropout rate is calculated for all 9th through 12th grade students. Each public school district is required to track and report student dropouts using this calculation method.

Every student who attended a district school the previous year and who fails to re-enroll is considered a drop out, unless the school district receives formal notification that they have transferred to another school, home education program or adult education program, including GED preparation classes.

During the 2000-2001 school year, 401, or 3.1 %, of Sarasota County students dropped out of the public school system. The number who dropped out of 9th through 12th grades during the period from 1997–2001 was 1,672, which represents a four-year high school dropout rate of 14.5%.

Another way of looking at the problem of school drop out is to track a cohort group of 9th graders for graduation four years later. In the state of Florida, a high school graduate is a student who receives a standard diploma, special diploma or GED diploma. The graduation rate is the percent of students who graduate through the K-12 public education system within four years of enrolling in 9th grade. Based on this method of tracking, 70.3% of Sarasota County Public School (SCPS) students who entered 9th grade in 1997-1998 school year graduated from a district school in four years.

There are several reasons why dropout and graduation rates may not provide a clear sense of the extent of high school drop out or how many youth complete their high school education.

These include:

- A 9th grade student who doesn't complete high school in four years is not counted in the graduation rate. Some students take more than four years to complete high school and high school students who have been retained and subsequently graduate are never counted in the graduation rate. The Florida Department of Education publishes a five-year graduation rate, which is used to see if a given group of students has a higher graduation rate if followed for a year past the typical four-year period. The five-year graduation rate for students who entered 9th grade during the 1997-1998 school year and graduated in 2000-2002 was 77.2%, or 6.9% more than the four-year graduation rate. A total of 1,669 high school students were retained in 2000-2001 as compared to 473 students retained in kindergarten through 8th grades combined. Table 1 shows the number and rate of grade retention among high school students during 2000-2001.

**Table 1. High School Retentions
Sarasota County 2000-2001**

GRADE	9	10	11	12
Number	798	648	288	76
Rate	21.7%	22.4%	13.1%	2.8%

Source: FDOE

Note: The number of students = percent retained times October 2000 enrollment for grade

- A student who withdraws from public high school to enroll in GED preparation classes through the Adult and Community Education Center (ACEC) is not counted as a dropout. Since they do not complete their high school education in a public high school, they are not counted in the graduation rate.

From July 1998 to June 2002, 633 sixteen- and seventeen- year-olds who were enrolled in ACEC GED classes took the GED exam. If these students withdrew to attend GED preparation courses, they were not counted as dropouts. Of 80 ACEC GED students who completed an informal survey as part of this study, 25 (31%) left high school and enrolled in GED classes within the same year and 18 (23%) enrolled within one year.

- Students who withdraw from middle school and are not known to have re-enrolled in school are not counted as dropouts. State law requires children to attend school until age 16 and legal action can be taken against students and parents for non-attendance. Schools are not always able to locate middle school students who do not re-enroll or who are not attending school and it is not clear how many middle school students stop attending school.

Appendix A contains additional information about high school dropout rates and graduation rates in Sarasota County Public Schools.

National, State and District Comparisons

Varying calculation methods and definitions among states complicates determining a national graduation and dropout rate. Efforts by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) to get all states to report dropout data has resulted in limited participation due to differences in how states collect information. For example, several states, including Florida, don't include those pursuing their GED in dropout statistics, while many others do. The NCES reports a national dropout rate of 4.8%.

The lack of a consistent method for calculating dropout and graduation rates among states makes comparisons difficult. Table 2 shows the high school graduation rate for the nation, state and district as reported by three sources, each of which uses a different method of calculation:

Table 2. Graduation Rates - 1999-2000

	National Rate	Florida Rate	FL State Ranking
NCES	86.5%	N/A	N/A
MI	69%	55%	49
State of Florida	N/A	62.3%	45

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics, Manhattan Institute & Florida Department of Education

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports a national high school completion rate that represents the proportion of 18–24 year olds, not currently enrolled in high school, who completed a high school diploma or an equivalent credential, including a GED.

The Manhattan Institute (MI) reports a national high school graduation rate that considers only students who receive a standard high school diploma through the public school system. According to MI, the difference between their graduation rate and the high school completion rate reported by NCES is largely because the NCES counts GED recipients and other alternate credentials as high school graduates and uses a different methodology for counting dropouts.

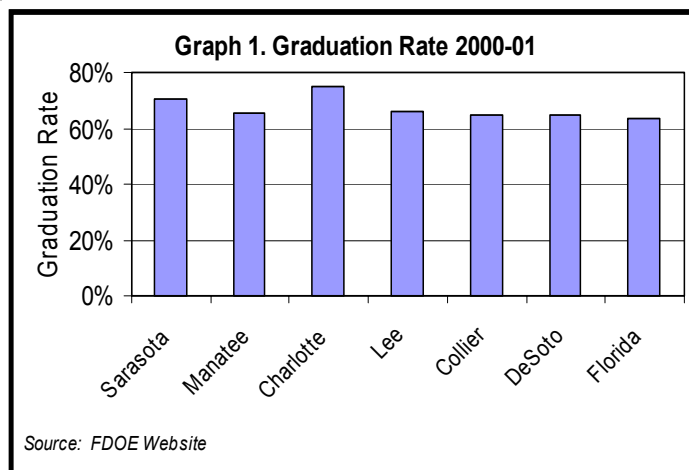
The Florida Department of Education - Florida is one of several states that do not participate in NCES because of differences in the method of calculating dropout and graduation rates. In a joint study about school dropout, the Council for Education Policy Research and Improvement and the Department of Education's Technology Division present a comparison of the graduation rates of all 50 states.

Other factors affecting dropout and graduation rates include:

- Limitations to tracking students who leave school and move to another state
- Reporting calendars can vary among districts and states
- Though \$45 million dollars is spent on national assessment of educational data, less than \$1 million is spent on assessment of dropout data.

Experts believe that steps should be taken to improve the data collection process and make it more efficient across state lines and that there is a need for more consistent policies and improved tracking systems.

When compared with other districts in Florida, 34 of 67 districts have higher dropout rates than Sarasota and 45 have lower graduation rates. Graph 1 shows a comparison of districts in southwest Florida.



identifies the following personal and societal costs related to school drop out in Florida. The study includes data about employment, earnings and educational attainment within the state of Florida. It does not track outcomes for students who left the state.

"[If I hadn't dropped out] I would have a much better job. I would be a lot further than I am now. I would probably be a radiologist or something."
GED Student, The Stories Project

Personal Costs

A fall 2000 follow-up of 1999-2000 high school students (see Table 3) shows that:

- Standard diploma recipients were more likely than dropouts to be employed full-time.

The Cost of School Dropout

School dropout has personal and societal costs and impacts economic development efforts in a community. A joint study by the Council for Education Policy Research and Improvement and the Department of Education's Technology Division

Table 3. Comparison of Florida & Sarasota County High School Students - 1999-2000

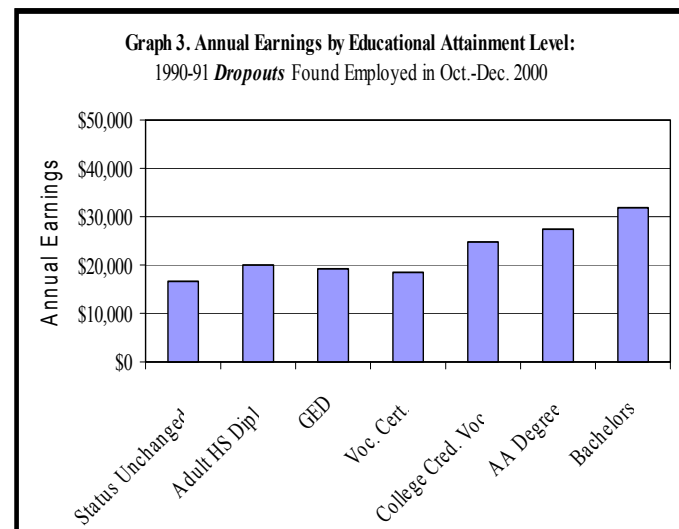
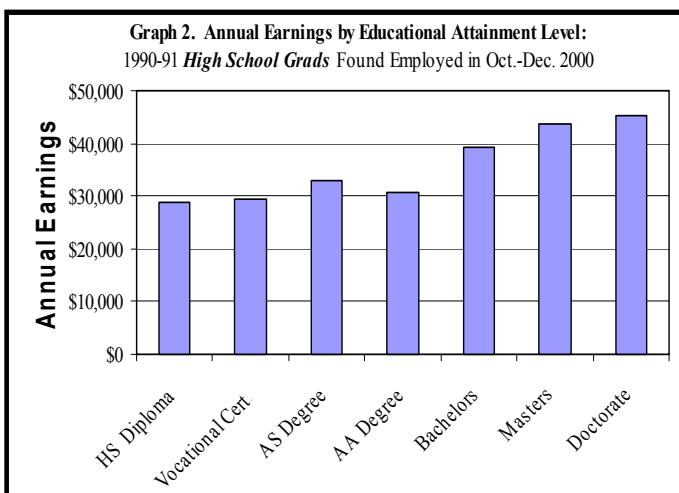
	Sarasota Diploma Recipients		Dropouts	
	Sarasota	Florida	Sarasota	Florida
Total Students	1,805	99,821	329	34,609
Any Employment	58%	57%	50%	41%
Full-Time Employment	20%	19%	18%	11%
Enrolled in Postsecondary	54%	58%	4%	6%
Public Assistance	1%	2%	8%	12%

Source: FETPIP, Pfeiffer & Wright, Oct. 2001

- Dropouts are more likely to be unemployed or working part-time.
- Standard diploma recipients were much more likely to be enrolled in postsecondary education at every level, including workforce education programs.
- Dropouts are more likely to be receiving some form of public assistance.

Based on a fall 2000 follow-up of 1990-1991 high school students in the State of Florida:

- Less than 1/3 of the dropouts had achieved any further education credential beyond their high school diploma
- For those dropouts who did convert to high school graduate status, their earnings lagged those of their counterparts who graduated on time. See Graphs 2 and 3.



- On an individual basis, moving someone from “less than high school” to high school graduation or equivalent status increases estimated annual earnings by an average of \$7,163 (from \$15,615 to \$22,927).
- Based on the 1999 Current Population Survey data (U.S. Census Bureau), Floridians age 16 and older with a high school diploma or equivalency generated \$7.7 billion dollars in additional personal income over individuals with less than a high school diploma.

Societal Costs

The societal costs associated with lower levels of education include foregone tax revenues and increased public costs associated with public assistance, incarceration, and health care. There are also a number of associated quality-of-life concerns such as health practices, voter participation, and community involvement. Additional findings reported include:

- Based on fall 2000 follow-up of 1999-2000 high school students, standard diploma graduates were less likely than dropouts to receive public assistance payments (2% versus 12%).
- The Florida Department of Corrections indicates that in 1999-2000, 87% of Florida’s inmate population tested at less than a 12th grade educational level.
- On a statewide basis, increasing the status of dropouts to high school graduate or its equivalent would increase both annual federal income tax revenues and annual state sales tax revenue as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Estimated Tax Revenue Increases by Educational Attainment		
Increased Attainment Level to:	Federal Taxes	State Taxes
High School Graduate	2.3 billion	769 million
Bachelor Degree	8.1 billion	2.7 billion

Source: FETPIP, Pfeiffer & Wright, Oct. 2001

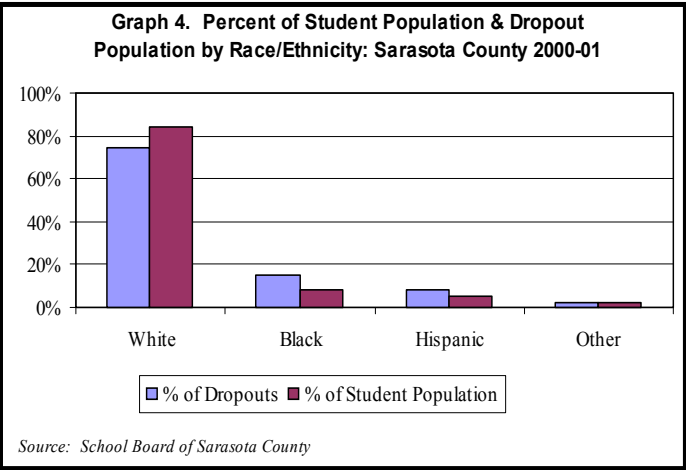
The report concludes that there would be a substantial cost associated with improving the educational level of Florida’s high school dropout population. However, the increased tax revenues described above would compensate for the cost

of each individual with less than a high school diploma to complete their GED in approximately five years.

A representative of the Suncoast Workforce Board noted that in the past, business relocation and expansion decisions focused on the cost of land, low taxes, and the availability of natural resources. In today’s business environment, the main concern is skilled personnel and the availability of workforce that can meet the employer’s needs both today and in the future. The presence of an effective educational system is a factor in relation to an area’s future viable workforce and can play a role in how successful industry can be in convincing employees with children to relocate.

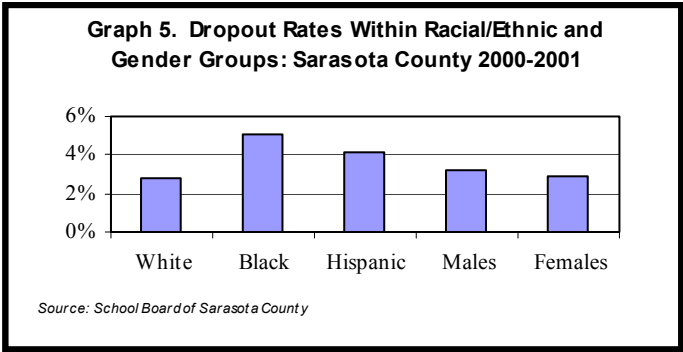
Who Drops Out?

Graphs 4 and 5 illustrate the percent of dropouts by racial/ethnic group compared to their representation in the population and the dropout rate within racial/ethnic and gender groups. Black and Hispanic students drop out at higher rates than other minority and white students.



The reasons for higher dropout rates among minority students are not fully understood, but when socio-economic factors are controlled, for differences across other factors such as race and gender are blurred. A study conducted by the Minority Achievement Network found very little difference between students of varying races in terms of their desire to excel in school. The study also found that:

- Almost half of black and Hispanic students said they failed to understand their teachers lessons most of the time compared to 27% of whites and 32% Asians.
- Only 20% of Hispanics and 27% of blacks said they had a computer at home compared with 57% of white and 42% of Asian students.



A resource speaker observed that parents who have a child while in school are more likely to drop out. Additionally, parents with low educational attainment are less likely to pass on the value of education to their children. In 2000, Sarasota County births to mothers age 15-19 were 127 per 1,000 women for blacks, 110 per 1,000 women for Hispanics and 37 per 1,000 for whites.

Research shows that poverty, regardless of race, ethnicity or gender, is one of the strongest predictors of dropping out. Eligibility for reduced or free lunch is used by the school district as a measure of low-income status. In fall 2001, there were 12,719 Sarasota County students, or 34%, receiving reduced or free lunch. Of these students, 57% were white, 22% were black and 16% were Hispanic. Low-income students represented 36% of the 2000-2001 dropout population. Table 5 shows that minority groups are disproportionately represented among low-income families.

Research indicates that the lower the family income, the less likely parents are to read to their children. Children raised in poverty are less likely to be prepared to enter kindergarten and their parents are less likely to be involved in their education. Resource speakers observed that because

Table 5. Poverty* by Race and Hispanic or Latino Designation, Sarasota County, Florida						
	White (not Hispanic)		Black or African American		Hispanic or Latino	
	Below poverty level		Below poverty level		Below poverty level	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Married couple families w/children under 18	496	2.9%	81	13.4%	311	24.7%
Female householder with no husband present: w/ children under 18	1,045	22.0%	681	69.3%	106	32.8%
<i>*Based on 1999 income</i> <i>Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000</i>						

of the lack of resources, low socio-economic status students also face barriers such as:

- Inability to afford tutoring or other resources to help improve academic performance.
- Lack of access to technology at home (a computer, internet, cable). Technology has become an important instructional tool and helps students be more efficient with their school work.
- Lack of transportation to academic and after school programs.

Resource people pointed out that while students from families with low incomes are over represented in the dropout population, poverty does not affect an individual's innate ability to learn. A societal attitude that students of low socio-economic status are not likely to succeed in school can lead to expectations among educators, parents and students that become self-fulfilling.

While low socio-economic and minority students are over-represented in the dropout population, the majority of dropouts do not fall into these high-risk groups. National data shows that 70% of dropouts do not come from low-income families, 57% are white and 68% come from two parent homes. In Sarasota County, 64% of 2000-01 dropouts were not considered low socio-economic status and 75% were white.

Exceptional students, excluding the gifted, are also over represented (approximately 25%) in the 2000-2001 dropout population. There are many exceptionalities

and categories/levels within and the school district has many programs and process in place to assist exceptional students education (ESE). While ESE students represent a significant proportion of dropouts, it was not possible to study the ESE system in depth within the timeframe of the study.

When Do Students Drop Out?

National data shows that students usually drop out between the ages of 15 and 17, depending on district compulsory education requirements. The compulsory school attendance age is 16 in the state of Florida. The number and rate of dropout by age for the Sarasota school district is not available.

Dropout often occurs at critical transition points, such as the transition from middle school to high school (8th grade

Table 6. Annual Distribution of the Dropout Population at Time of Withdrawal - Sarasota				
School year	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
1997-1998	51%	27%	14%	9%
1998-1999	37%	34%	16%	12%
1999-2000	42%	31%	19%	9%
2000-2001	35%	30%	16%	19%
2001-2002	34%	29%	18%	19%
Source: School Board of Sarasota County				

to 9th grade). In Sarasota County Public Schools the largest percentage of dropouts occur in 9th and 10th grade, with the majority occurring during 9th grade. Table 6 shows the percentage of dropouts by grade for the past four years. The dropout rate at 9th grade is decreasing, however at 11th and 12th grades it is increasing.

Why Do Youth Drop Out of School?

Schools and districts do not always know why students leave school. Many schools, including Sarasota public schools, don't require exit surveys or interviews. Sarasota County School Board representatives noted that many dropouts just stop coming to school, so there isn't the opportunity to conduct an exit interview.

Dropping out of school is a complicated, multi-faceted phenomenon. Researchers find it is a process, not an event. Factors that can lead to a student dropping out of school may be student related, family related, school related or community related. While there are certain factors that correlate with school drop out, any one factor, or even several factors, do not necessarily place students at risk of dropping out. However, certain combinations of factors may help to identify the potential to drop out. Information about the combinations of characteristics that dominate the Sarasota public school's dropout population is not available. The data the Sarasota County School District captures electronically is limited to academic information and basic demographics. Information about characteristics such as parent's income, family status, and parent's education is not captured for reporting purposes. Sarasota County School District representatives agreed that the ability to combine this type of information with academic data would be valuable for understanding the dropout population, but there is currently no comprehensive database that

provides this capability. The district employees are currently working on a longitudinal study using available data that will provide more information about the dropout population.

Studies indicate and representatives from the Sarasota County School Board agree that the reasons for school drop out are similar across the nation. The U.S. Department of Education lists the major risk factors as:

- Poor academic performance
- Repeating more than one grade
- Low socio-economic background
- English as a second language
- Becoming pregnant
- Frequently absent/truant

In addition to these factors, research (Janosz, et al 1997) shows that potential dropouts tend to:

- Feel disengaged from school
- Have parents who did not get far in their schooling

Table 7. Survey Results - Why Students Leave School

GED	Reasons for leaving	DOP	Why students leave
56%	Didn't like school or was bored	77%	Didn't like school or was bored
45%	Poor grades	76%	Poor grades
40%	Teachers did not help enough/Poor teaching	69%	Problems with drugs/alcohol
34%	Did not get along with teachers	63%	Poor study habits
34%	Poor study habits	61%	Problems with law/police
33%	Poor test scores	57%	Poor test scores
31%	Had trouble with reading or math	57%	Got suspended/expelled
30%	Held back/too old for grade	57%	Social life more important
29%	Did not feel part of school	56%	Did not get along with teachers
26%	Changed schools/did not like new school	55%	Friends dropped out

Source: Informal Opinion Survey, SCOPE, 2003

- Have behavioral and psychological problems and are arrested more frequently.

When students were asked why they dropped out, a national study showed that the top five reasons were that they didn't like school, were failing, couldn't get along with teachers, couldn't keep up with school work, or they were pregnant/got married. In an informal opinion survey conducted as part of this study, 80 students participating in Sarasota Adult and Community Education GED classes were asked why they left high school. In a separate survey, 94 dropout prevention (DOP) students at a Sarasota public high school were asked why they think students leave school. Table 7 shows the ten most frequent responses for each group.

When asked about the reasons Sarasota County students leave school, local resource people agree that many of the problems that eventually lead to drop out begin early in a child's life, but it is in middle school that these problems begin to manifest in behavioral issues. High schools are held responsible for student completion and it is during high school that students can legally drop out. Resource people identified the following problems that, in their experience, contribute to student drop out locally.

Student, Family and Social Factors

Early Childhood Experiences - Published materials and resource people stressed the importance of early interventions for preventing school dropout. Research shows that both prenatal health and early childhood education influence academic achievement.

Healthy pregnancy and lifestyle choices made while pregnant affect the development of the baby, which can in turn affect their readiness for school. For example:

- Brain development can be impaired by substance abuse and malnutrition.
- Prolonged, severe anxiety on the part of the mother during pregnancy can lead to hyperactivity in the child, which is linked with difficulties in school.
- Nutrition during early childhood impacts physical and social development. The absence of social skills has been correlated with disassociation from school.

While risks to healthy birth are not always the result of poverty, there is a higher rate of health problems at birth among those who live in poverty. Data also indicates that

the blacks and Hispanics experience a disproportionate rate of low birth weight and infant mortality, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Low Birth Weight and Infant Mortality - Sarasota County				
Indicator	2001 Annual Rate Whole County	3-year rolling average - 1999-2001		
		White	Black	Hispanic
Infant Mortality	3.6	4.7	10.1	8.7
Low Birth Weight	7.21	6.8	13.9	6.2
Sources: SCOPE 2002-2003 Community Report Card				

Research also shows that the effectiveness of early childhood programs impacts the academic success of children. National averages show that three out of five children under the age of six are in childcare and that 70% of mothers and 98% of fathers with children under six are in the labor force, and most of their families need the income to stay out of poverty. The 2000 census data for Sarasota County shows that of children under six, 61.5% have all parents in the family in the labor force.

National data shows that children raised in middle class homes that are offer educational enrichment are not negatively affected by the lack of quality childcare. However, those raised in poverty and/or who lacked educational enrichment at home are negatively affected. Recent data shows that:

- Only two out of ten parents report reading to their babies daily. Only 45% of parents of toddlers over the age of 24 months are likely to read to their children daily. The lower the family income, the less likely parents are to read to their children at least once a day (National Center for Children in Poverty Fall 2002).
- Children who have not developed some basic literacy skills by the time they enter school are three to four times more likely to drop out in later years (National Adult Literacy Survey, Child Care Bulletin Fall 2002).

In Florida, nearly one in six children starts kindergarten without the basic skills they need to succeed and most are from low-income families. In 2002, Sarasota County kindergartners met the state average of 17% in terms of readiness for school. However, 23% of Charlotte County

students and 18% of Manatee County students were not prepared. In Sarasota County, 775 children are on waiting lists to participate in subsidized preschool programs (*Sarasota Herald Tribune*, Nov.24, 2002).

Behavioral Problems - Resource people noted that the breakdown in family structure and substance abuse are two major underlying causes of school-related behavior problems such as absenteeism, truancy, suspension, expulsion and other behavior/discipline problems. Family issues include level of parent education, family income, single-parent households, parental neglect, parental substance abuse, domestic violence and physical and sexual abuse.

Substance Abuse - According to a resource speaker, substance abuse is a growing problem among Sarasota County youth and contributing factors include substance abuse at home and the attitude that marijuana and alcohol use is acceptable. It was observed that this attitude has spilled over to youth who identify themselves as “druggies” and argue that it is an acceptable lifestyle choice. Table 9

Table 9. Substance Abuse Among Middle and High School Students		
Middle School	Risk Behavior	High School
37%	Consumed first drink of alcohol by age 12	30%
44%	Had at least one drink in lifetime	78%
11%	Tried marijuana by age 12	13%
14%	Tried marijuana at least once in lifetime	43%
16%	Used inhalants to get high during lifetime	17%
Source: Sarasota County Youth Risk Behavior Survey High School and Middle School - 2001		

provides an indication of substance abuse among middle and high school youth.

Drugs and alcohol are the most common cause of expulsion, resulting in 55% of all expulsions during 2000-01. Substance abuse also contributes to behavior problems, poor academic performance and drop out. Until recently, there were no residential treatment options for youth. Now there are 20 beds for males only through Compass, a program of

Coastal Behavioral Healthcare, Inc. and First Step, Inc. has developed an outpatient treatment program for youth. Several resource speakers noted that even with these services, there is a lack of adequate treatment options for youth in Sarasota County.

Absenteeism and Truancy - Dropout students, on average, were absent significantly more days (average annual absences of 57 days between 1998 and 2001) than non-dropouts (average annual absences of 37 days between 1998 and 2001) and 40% of dropouts were withdrawn from school because of non-attendance.

The state of Florida requires children to attend school until they are 16 years of age. Parents must sign an age waiver for children to withdraw from school between the ages of 16 and 18. Attendance was cited as a major challenge for Sarasota public schools. In 2000-2001, an average of 12% of middle school students and 16% of high school students were absent more than 21 days out of the school year.

A representative of the Sarasota County Sheriff’s department estimates that there are an average of 300 habitual truants on any given day. Truancy usually begins at an early age and is prevalent during 6th grade through high school — especially during transition years from grade school to middle school and middle school to high school. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (*Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, September 2001):

- Students with the highest truancy rates have the lowest academic achievement rates and truants are the youth most likely to drop out of school.
- In 1998, truancy accounted for 26% of all formally handled juvenile offense cases nationally, representing an 85% increase in truancy cases in juvenile court since 1989.
- High truancy is linked to daytime crime, burglary and vandalism.
- Underlying issues associated with truancy are family poverty, less education, substance abuse, and cultural variations in the value of education and pressures on youth to work and provide childcare for younger siblings.

Expulsions - The Florida Department of Education reported that 2.5% of 2000-01 Sarasota Public School withdrawals are due to expulsion. Recommendations for expulsion were

made for less than 1% of the student population during 2001-2002, but the number of recommendations for expulsions in Sarasota County has been steadily increasing. During 1999–2000, there were 100 recommendations for expulsion; in 20001 – 2002 there were 216. Of the 216 recommendations for expulsion in 2000-2001, 202 or 94% occurred in middle and high school with the highest rates of expulsion in 8th and 9th grades. Of the students recommended for expulsion, the majority signed settlement agreements, which allow them to attend a second chance school. In 2002-2002, 192 students attended second chance schools and 22 were expelled.

Table 10 shows recommendations for expulsion by race and gender. While the majority of students recommended for

In Sarasota County, the 1999 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (State of Florida Department of Health) revealed that 14% of high school students missed school because they felt unsafe at school or traveling to and from school. Another 16% reported that they had carried a weapon to school during the 30 days preceding the survey.

According to a resource speaker, hostile school environments contribute to student dropout rates; students who are teased, bullied, or harassed are at risk of underachieving and/or dropping out. The importance of a safe and supportive climate for every middle and high school, and appropriate interventions for victims as well as victimizers was noted.

English as a Second Language and Immigration Status - Since 1997, the proportion of Sarasota public school children with limited English proficiency (LEP) has grown 65%. Of the 1,590 students in Sarasota public schools whose primary language is other than English (fall 2001), 70% are Hispanic. Though Spanish-speaking students are most common, in south Sarasota County there is a high representation of Russian and Ukrainian students. Of the 2001-2002 dropouts, 4.9% were identified as LEP students.

Table 10. Recommendations for Expulsion by Race and Gender Sarasota Middle and High School - 2000-2001						
	White	Black	Hispanic	Other	Male	Female
Number Recommended	147	39	15	1	155	47
% of Recommended	73%	19%	7%	1%	77%	23%
% Student population	84.3%	7.9%	5.2%	2.5%	51.1%	48.9%
Source: Sarasota County School Board and Florida Department of Education website Note: Enrollment by race is from Fall 2001 Student Membership (FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION website, School District Data)						

expulsion are white males, the rate of expulsion recommendations among black and Hispanic students tend to be higher than for white students. Within racial ethnic groups, 0.93% of white students were recommended for expulsion compared to 2.2% of black students, 1.1% of Hispanic students, and 0.2% other minority students. The school district is in the process of reviewing data for the previous three years to determine if there are any trends regarding suspensions, expulsions, and school drop out.

School Violence – The Educational Development Center (1996) found that anti-social and aggressive behaviors are strong predictors of dropping out. During the 2000-2001 school year, there were 1,774 incidences of crime and violence reported by the schools in Sarasota County. These included violent acts against other persons (12%), alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (14%), theft (4%), fighting and harassment (41%), weapons possession (2%), and other non-violent incidents (27%). Of the incidences of crime and violence, 12% took place in elementary schools, 59% in middle schools, and 29% in high schools.

Resource speakers noted that students and families whose primary language is other than English face several challenges that may contribute to school drop out:

- Recent immigrants do not know how to navigate the public school system. When coupled with language barriers, this creates an obstacle for parental involvement in children’s education.
- Academic versus social (conversational) language is a major barrier to academic success. Social language can take two to three years to become proficient, academic language skills can take five to ten years to acquire. Students may be able to speak the language socially, but reading comprehension for those whose primary language is not English is much more difficult.
- Many students don’t have legal immigration status, though they have been here from a young age. As a result they are unable to work, they are not eligible for many scholarships, and cannot attend certain colleges.

This creates disincentives for completing high school. Resource speakers noted that legislative action to help overcome these barriers and allow students to get in-state tuition and/or work permits upon graduation could help to improve the high school completion rate among Hispanic and other students with immigration status.

- The Hispanic population is the fastest growing minority population in the country. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the Hispanic population in Sarasota County grew to 14,142, an increase of 140%, between 1990 and 2000. Resource people expressed concern over the shortage of bi-lingual staff in education and health and human services to support the needs of this rapidly growing population.

Working Students – Students’ work schedules may be interfering with learning. Some research shows that student employment begins to correlate with dropping out when a student regularly works 14 hours per week. Other studies place the critical level at 20 hours a week, with the likelihood of dropping out increasing with the number of hours worked (Wood, 1995). There are two views about the effect of part-time employment in high school on academic performance:

- Work has value in bringing about a smooth transition to the world of work
- Time spent working displaces academic activities such as homework and involvement in other school-related activities and results in poor academic performance and lower academic aspirations.

Research on the topic has produced inconsistent findings, with some positive and some negative results. A study of the effect of the number of hours worked each week showed that students who worked long hours had poorer academic performance. The study also showed that students who had high academic performance tended to work fewer hours and those with low academic performance tended to work more (Singh, 1998). In a more recent study (Warren, 2002), the author concludes high school students who work intensively at paid jobs tend not to do as well in school, are more likely to drop out, and are less likely to go on to college. While these may be good reasons to amend and/or enforce child labor laws, the author states that employment may be a symptom, not a cause of some student’s academic struggles. The author contends that students who see paid employment, and not college, as the activity that will occupy their time after graduation are more likely to turn to intensive paid employment while still in school.

Federal and state law restricts the hours youth ages 14 and 15 can work. Federal law places no restrictions on minors ages 16 and 17, but the state of Florida prohibits more than 30 hours per week and night work between 11p.m. and 6:30 a.m., before a school day for these students. Resource speakers noted that students are working late at night, contrary to child labor laws. There are many reasons youth work. Some students are working to help support their family or helping to raise siblings, especially in single-parent homes, others work so they can buy a car or other luxury items. In some cases, work is the reason students leave school.

The results of a school improvement survey conducted at one Sarasota high school showed that more than 40% of students are working 30 hours a week or more during the school year. Of the GED students and dropout prevention students responding to an informal opinion survey, 80 reported working while attending public high school. Of those working, 45% reported working 21 – 30 hours per week and 26% reported working more than 30 hours per week.

Student Mobility – Resource people observed that Sarasota County and the state of Florida have a transient, mobile population and that high student mobility, or movement from one school to another, is a contributing factor to student dropout. Homelessness also contributes to mobility and there are approximately 500 homeless children in Sarasota County on any given day. As part of a school district study of the 2000-2001 dropout population, an analysis of mobility was conducted. The results showed that 73% of 2000-2001 dropouts were “highly mobile.” A student was designated highly mobile if he or she moved more than twice during either elementary, middle or high school.

The FDOE reports that student mobility for Sarasota County during 1999-2000, (the last year this data is available) was approximately 20% for middle and high school students. Mobility is defined as the rate at which students move into and out of the school population during the school year. Mobility rates vary among individual schools. During 1999-2000, student mobility for individual public schools (excluding charter and special schools) ranged from 14.6% to 29.2% for middle schools and 17.4% to 28.4% for high schools.

Research shows that student mobility is correlated with student dropout. A workforce development study conducted in Central Illinois looked at the issue of mobility and school dropout and concluded:

- Mobility, especially during the course of an academic year, disrupts student focus and morale and result in lower productivity. If students move during their high school years, their chances of graduating are greatly reduced.
- While minority status, poverty and high student mobility correlated with higher dropout rates, of these three factors, high student mobility showed the strongest relationship. Where turnover is low in Illinois, even in poorer, minority communities, the dropout rate is lower.
- Reducing student turnover is a shared responsibility between the community and the schools of the district.

The study cites the Chicago Public Schools “Staying Put” program as a model for addressing student turnover. Key features are:

- Make educators, students, parents, and others aware of the academic and social consequences of student mobility.
- Ensure that the transfer process, when necessary, reduces the disruptions to student learning and achievement.
- Promote the establishment of school-based programs to address student mobility and educate parents about policies that allow students to remain in a school rather than transfer to other schools (for example, Florida’s School Choice policy).
- Welcoming Steering Committees that provide a personalized program for each new student is also a strategy that has been used successfully in other communities.

According to local school board representatives, school choice and student assignment policies in Sarasota were developed to reduce the mobility rate. The policy allows a student who moves out of their schools attendance area to remain in the current school through the highest-grade level as long as the school is not over capacity or fails to comply with behavior or attendance expectations. The Sarasota school district does not have a formal, on-going reporting system that provides data about the characteristics and causes of student mobility. Teachers and guidance counselors work with transfer students to ensure they are caught up on schoolwork and to help them adjust socially to their new school. However, other than school choice

and the student assignment policy, there is not a formal policy or program that addresses student mobility.

Family and Community Support - Resource people made the following observations related to students whom they consider at risk of dropping out:

- There are parents who are not directly involved in their children’s education, especially at the high school level, but at the middle school level as well. When both parents are working they are less likely to be available to help with schoolwork and may not be able to ensure that their children attend school.
- There is a tendency to think children are old enough to accept responsibility and do not need supervision beginning as early as middle school age. The school day ends several hours before parents get home from work and there are few after school programs for middle and high school students. Data shows that many problems occur during the period after school until parents are home from work.
- Many children being raised in dysfunctional families lack the adult support and guidance needed to be successful. Students at risk of dropping out often lack a caring, supportive adult role model in their lives.
- There are students who lack basic necessities such as health care, nutrition, and housing. These unmet needs interfere with their ability to succeed academically.

School-Related Factors

Academic Achievement - Research supports that poor academic performance is the most significant school-related predictor of dropping out and that students who repeat one or more grades are twice as likely to drop out as those who have never failed a grade. In 2000-2001 Sarasota County public school students who dropped out had:

- More retentions (1.59), on average, than non-dropouts (.35)
- A grade point average of 1.6 compared to 2.6 for non-dropouts.
- Lower scores on standardized tests; the majority of dropouts scored below an acceptable level of achievement (level two or lower) on the 10th grade

Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in either math (73%) or reading (80%)

The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) was established in 1999 as a way to measure achievement of the Sunshine State Standards that are being taught to and learned by Florida students. All public school students 3rd through 10th grade are required to take the test. Students performing at a level two are considered to be performing below an acceptable level and those at a level one are considered below minimum standards. Table 14 shows the percent of students scoring at a level one and two in 2002 in the Sarasota school district and for all districts in the state.

Some resource people expressed concern that changes in state requirements may contribute to increases in the dropout rate. According to resource people, the requirements for graduation have changed and some educators view them as unrealistic, particularly the requirement to pass algebra. Beginning with the 2002-2003 school year, students are required to pass the 10th grade FCAT, with a score of 300 or better, in order to graduate and receive a standard diploma and they have multiple chances to pass the test. Florida

students have been given an exit exam since 1976, but the FCAT is considered more difficult than the previous test, the HSCT. By way of example at the start of school last year, South Broward High School in Broward County had 80 seniors who hadn't passed the HSCT. This year the school has 125 seniors who haven't passed the FCAT — an increase of more than 50%. Educators have also expressed concern that the FCAT jeopardized students who are performing at an average level and that there are students who are meeting the GPA requirements and completing their course work who cannot pass the FCAT.

In 2002, 54% of all 10th grade students (including gifted and other exceptional education students) scored at a level 2 or lower on the FCAT. The mean score for Sarasota 10th graders was 303 in reading and 313 in math. Table 12 shows the percent of Sarasota public school students enrolled in the standard curriculum who scored below an acceptable level on the 10th grade FCAT for the past four years.

Effective for the 2002-2003 school year, the Florida legislature mandated that schools retain 3rd grade students who are not reading on grade level. In Spring 2002, 521 3rd

Table 11. Percent of Students Level 1 & 2 FCAT Scores - 2002 - All Curriculum Groups

Grade Level	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th
Reading - Sarasota	30%	34%	36%	40%	40%	45%	61%	54%
Reading - State	41%	45%	46%	48%	50%	55%	71%	65%
Math - Sarasota	27%	35%	39%	48%	41%	34%	37%	29%
Math - State	41%	50%	52%	57%	54%	47%	52%	40%

Source: Florida Department of Education

Note: Includes Exceptional Education Students

Table 12. Standard Curriculum Students Level 1 & 2 Grade 10 FCAT Scores - Sarasota School District

	1999		2000		2001		2002	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
White	51%	30%	53%	24%	42%	19%	44%	17%
Black	93%	79%	82%	61%	84%	65%	83%	61%
Hispanic	73%	55%	82%	67%	74%	48%	71%	37%
Low SES	70%	57%	74%	47%	69%	43%	71%	36%

Source: School Board of Sarasota County; Prepared by RAE

graders in Sarasota County scored low enough on the FCAT, at a level one, to be retained if the law had been in effect.

A total of 1,669 Sarasota County public high school students were retained in 2000-2001 as compared to 473 students retained in kindergarten through 8th grades combined. Retention is highly correlated with dropout. Advocates of retention point out that promoting a child regardless of academic achievement puts a child in situations they are not prepared for, i.e. the next grade level, post secondary education or work. Opponents of retention point to research that shows that retention does not help a child socially or academically and that there is a strong correlation between retention and long-term negative academic outcomes, including school dropout. The majority of research shows that retention is ineffective and may even be damaging (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1999).

Research shows that the increased use of testing to determine if a student can graduate or be promoted a grade level has generated opposing views of the possible impact on school dropout rates. The threat of not receiving a diploma or being retained motivates students to work harder, resulting in higher academic achievement; versus failing a high school exit exam or being retained or even just anticipating such failure can cause some students to quit school leading to a higher dropout rate (“Do High Stakes Tests Drive Up Student Dropout Rates?” WestEd, 2001).

There is some research that supports each side of the argument, but there is not enough good data or research to settle the debate. For example, dropout rates in New York City have increased since the state’s new exit exam took effect in 1996. However, other studies suggest that dropout rates increase in the short term but that students improve to meet and even exceed the higher standards over time.

According to the FDOE, the goals of the school improvement program are to identify students who are not meeting educational standards for their grade level so they can get remedial help and to improve student, teacher and school performance. Another result is that teachers and principals may be held accountable for their student’s test results. While local resource people agree that accountability is important, some expressed concern that the current system of high stakes testing and school accountability may contribute to increases in student dropout rates for the following reasons:

- The implementation time frames for the new standards and “high stakes” testing may not have been adequate

for students to have the opportunity to learn the new material. It may have been more effective to introduce the new standards at the elementary level so that when students reach high school, they would have had more of an opportunity to learn the new standards.

- The practice of social promotion has resulted in a significant number of students entering high school who are unprepared academically. This contributes to the high rate of grade retention in 9th grade and difficulty in achieving the standards required to pass the FCAT and meet graduation requirements.
- School accountability encourages teachers to focus most of their efforts on preparing students to take the FCAT exam to the exclusion of other activities, making learning less relevant and less interesting for some students.
- The amount of time required to prepare students for the test as well as increased paperwork leaves teachers less time to spend with students and parents focusing on individual student needs.
- The use of retention for students, school grades and financial sanctions for low performing schools make the system punitive versus developmental.
- Non-college bound, vocationally oriented students may be more likely to fail because prior to the current standards, there were more classes that met the needs of a wider range of students. For example, a student who couldn’t pass algebra had the option of taking consumer or business math.
- Failure to pass the 10th grade FCAT, particularly after multiple tries, may cause students to give up and leave school.

There is currently no data to support a relationship between the new standards and increasing dropout rates, but the requirement to pass the FCAT exam in order to graduate has just taken effect and its impact on school dropout will become apparent over the next few years.

According to researchers, the use of standards and accountability should work as an early warning system, identifying students who need extra help (and the areas they need it), teachers who need support in adjusting their teaching practices to ensure better learning and systems and local and statewide systems that need adjustments. To ensure

program goals are achieved, states are encouraged to develop policies and support systems that serve the complementary desires for increased student achievement and decreased dropout rates and to evaluate and disclose negative, unintended consequences of accountability and high stakes testing (“Do High Stakes Tests Drive Up Student Dropout Rates?” WestEd, 2001).

Academic Relevance - The Audit of Educational Effectiveness for the Sarasota County School District conducted by School Match in 1998 concluded that the Sarasota school district is providing its college-bound students with outstanding academic programs but that there is also evidence of students who are underserved by the district. The report recommends that there should be more focus on programs for those students choosing technical and vocational preparations.

Of 2001-2002 graduates, 53% reported that they planned to attend college (community college or a four-year college or university), 4% planned to attend technical school and 43% had no plans for postsecondary education. The *2001-2002 Florida Indicators Report* for the Sarasota County School District one year following graduation shows that while 68% of 2000-2001 graduates reported that they planned to pursue post secondary education, 54% were actually continuing their education.

Local educators and students responding to an informal opinion survey as part of this study noted that there continues to be few options for vocationally oriented students and that it is difficult to make the connection between some course material and “real world” applications. Resource people expressed that students who feel that their educational program lacks relevance to their personal goals and life outside of school, may “disengage” from school. This affects students at all levels of academic achievement. Studies show that feeling disconnected from school contributes to dropping out.

School Hours - Studies show that adolescents need more sleep yet Sarasota public schools begin classes as early as 7:30 a.m. Medical research has found that teenagers have biologically different sleep and wake patterns than those of the preadolescent or adult population. There is also evidence that adolescents are substantially sleep deprived when high school classes begin before 8:15 and that sleep deprivation has negative consequences for learning. As a result, the Minneapolis Public School District implemented later school start times (8:40 a.m. versus 7:15 a.m.) in 1997. Research conducted in the first year of the change showed

that students who do not experience a sleep lag syndrome reported higher grades, less depression, and fewer at-risk behaviors for dropping out of school. The results of a four-year study of this change revealed the following benefits:

- Improved attendance
- Lower mobility rates – fewer students transferred schools multiple times
- Less sleeping in class
- Less student reported depression

The study also found that:

- Contrary to expectations that students would stay up later, Minneapolis high school students get an hour’s more sleep each night than students starting at earlier times.
- Students who have insufficient credits for graduation are often those that have missed too many first and second hour classes. The significant improvement in attendance rates when schools initiated later start times suggests that changing start times may be one way to recapture students who are at risk of not completing high school.
- Teachers expressed positive effects from later start times including greater alertness throughout the day and more team planning in the mornings before students arrived.
- Principals reported that the hallways and lunchrooms were calmer. Reductions in tardiness and students dropping out of first and second period classes resulted in less congestion in principal’s offices and less paperwork.

The study points out that when considering changes to school start times, school administrators have to weigh factual information about the biology of adolescent sleep patterns against competing demands of teachers’ work preferences, athletic and after school activity schedules, and bus transportation schedules. The study notes the following:

- Changing school start times is difficult because of the many interrelated factors that determine when schools begin each day. District administrators who have considered changing school start times have

encountered resistance from those who feel their interests will be negatively affected.

- Interviews with school administrators, principals and school board members showed that making the decision to alter school start times is considered risky with the potential to polarize a community.
- Participation in after school activities remained at the same level but some students and coaches express dislike for earlier start times and some parents disliked the later time their children were returning home from after school activities
- Transportation costs are often cited as a reason that the change will not work in a district. The study showed that the change did not increase transportation costs. The same buses and routes were used, only the times changed.

Ninth Grade Transition - The transition from middle school to high school was cited by resource people as a significant factor contributing to school dropout. Transition issues include:

- At earlier grades teachers are discouraged from failing students because research shows that repeating a grade rarely helps students catch up with their peers. In high school, grades become more important and promotion to the next grade is determined by how many credits a student earns. For example, freshmen without enough credits cannot become a sophomore even if he or she received high grades in all completed classes. A student with enough credits is a senior whether he has been in high school for three years or five years.
- Students who are behind academically when they enter 9th grade are more likely to fail. In 2000 -01, 21.7% of Sarasota County Public School 9th graders were held back compared with a statewide average among districts of 17.4%. Freshmen students who fail could be 16, the age when Florida Law allows them to drop out. Over the past five years, 9th graders represented the highest proportion of students dropping out from Sarasota County public schools. In 2001 – 02, 34% of dropouts were 9th graders.
- Less nurturing and less personal attention. Students change classes every period and teachers change twice a year at the end of each semester. For students who

don't have the skills to cope academically, this may lead to failure.

- Transitions from grade school to middle school can also be difficult for students and it is during this transition that students may begin exhibiting behavior problems.

Impersonal Learning Environment - Resource people made the following observations about aspects of the learning environment that may contribute to student dropout:

- Students and society have changed significantly over the past 50 years, yet schools have not. There is a need for fundamental changes in how students are taught and in schools in general. There have been changes at the pre-school and elementary levels, some at the middle school. Historically, high schools have been resistant to change.
- The impersonal nature of large high schools, relationships with teachers and peers, and lack of involvement in extra curricular and co-curricular activities can all contribute to feelings of disconnectedness.
- Students learn in different ways and teachers must take differing learning styles into consideration in their instruction in order to reach all students. High students-to-teacher ratios in some schools make individualized instruction and personalized attention difficult. In 2001-02, the average class size in the five large public high schools ranged from 23 to 36 students. The goal of the recently passed class size amendment is no more than 25 students in a high school classroom. This amendment may support the development of a more personalized learning environment by decreasing class size.
- The American Counselor Association's recommendation is 1:250. The ratio of guidance counselors to students in the Sarasota school district is approximately 1 to 708 (1:1000 in the elementary schools and 1:500 in the middle and high schools). This is higher than the state average of 1:438 and the national average of 1:561. This provides little opportunity for students to receive assistance with overall career planning or proactive counseling in social-emotional issues.

~~CURRENT DROPOUT~~

PREVENTION EFFORTS

Organization Roles

The Role of Government

The public education system in the United States is delegated to the states. The Florida legislature has delegated the implementation of rules and regulations to the state department of education and to other state agencies. School districts are a managerial organization for the efficient operation of public education in each of the 67 counties in Florida. The Sarasota School District is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the public education program in the county.

The 2001 Florida Statutes contain the Dropout Prevention and Academic Intervention Act. The intent of this legislation is to authorize and encourage school boards to develop dropout prevention and academic intervention activities for students who do not perform well in traditional educational programs. It also encourages cooperative agreements with other public and private organizations to implement programs aimed at reducing school dropout and increasing the number of students who obtain a high school diploma.

Current efforts on the part of state government to improve Florida's educational standing are focused on the use of standardized testing and school accountability. The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) was established in 1999 as a way to measure achievement of the Sunshine State Standards that are being taught to and learned by Florida students. The FCAT is part of Florida's overall plan to increase student achievement by implementing higher standards for public school students. Student performance on the FCAT is part of the school grading system. School grades evaluate elementary, middle and high schools on the basis of aggregate student performance in reading, writing and math on the FCAT. School grades are directly linked to accountability sanctions and rewards.

Sarasota County School District

The School Board of Sarasota County is the governing body of the district and is responsible for the control, operation,

organization, management, and administration of public schools. The School Board of Sarasota County establishes public school policy at the local level. The district's comprehensive plan, The Campaign for Excellence, outlines ten district goals that address academic standards, learning environment, and social-emotional growth of students. Annually, each school conducts a needs assessment for each goal and implements a School Improvement Plan to address these goals and related gaps in student achievement. Student performance is based on acquisition of skills and knowledge as specified and measured on State Education Goals, Sunshine State Standards, and other state and national tests. Each school's budget is developed through the schools Shared Decision Making Team and School Advisory Council, which are comprised of parents, students, educators, business representatives, and community leaders. The budget is aligned with the priorities reflected in the School Improvement Plan.

One of the district's goals states that by 2005, 85% or more of entering high school students will graduate. In support of this goal, each school conducts an annual needs assessment and identifies goals and strategies based on the specific needs of their student population. Approaches for improving academic achievement and preventing dropout vary by school.

Another district goal is to reduce the achievement gap, with particular emphasis on students at-risk of dropping out of school and those scoring in the lowest 25% on the FCAT. There is not a district wide dropout prevention strategy or a central dropout prevention coordinator. However, each school's plans must be consistent with the district's strategies and benchmarks. Each school is ultimately responsible for its students' performance, including dropout and graduation rates.

Suncoast Workforce Board

The Suncoast Workforce Board (SWB) is a division of Workforce Florida, Inc. Its purpose is to provide the leadership to create effective strategies and systems for Manatee and Sarasota Counties that help residents enter, remain in, and advance in the workplace, become more highly skilled and successful, thereby benefiting residents and businesses and to assist in improving the regions business climate.

The Suncoast Workforce Board is comprised of 45 volunteers from businesses, schools and community organizations and promotes partnership and collaboration

as a key to the success of workforce development in our region. The First Jobs/First Wages Council of the Board oversees the Board's Youth programs and promotes education for youth and successful entry into the workforce. This group meets bimonthly and also sponsors a bi-annual Youth Services Networking Meeting to foster cooperation and resource sharing.

Community Organizations

The League of Women Voters, in an effort to identify dropout prevention efforts throughout the county has identified at least 25 programs offered by community organizations that serve the needs of at-risk youth. While it was not possible to explore each of these programs, this study attempted to explore current efforts and identify gaps in services on a district-wide basis.

Community Collaborations

There are many ways that the community collaborates with schools to help students succeed in school and many individuals and organizations are involved in trying to impact the issue of school dropout. For example:

- School staff refers students and their families to community organizations for services to help them address personal, social, and family issues.
- The school district contracts with private agencies for specific programs or services such as second chance schools and truancy intervention.
- Efforts to involve individuals and businesses through volunteerism such as mentoring and tutoring
- Formal collaborations such as the School Readiness Coalition, Children in Need of Services/Families in Need of Services (CINS/FINS) and the Business to School subcommittee of the Suncoast Workforce Board
- Sarasota County schools receive significant financial support from the community

Resource speakers identified the following challenges to collaborative approaches for addressing school dropout and opportunities for improvement:

- The lack of a coordinated, district-wide strategy, insufficient data about the effectiveness of current programs, and limitations of grant funding affect the ability to sustain successful programs. Resource speakers pointed out that a county-wide strategy that has well defined goals and objectives would encourage the education, human service, and business communities to collaborate and pool resources. This level of partnering could positively affect sustainability and create additional grants and funding opportunities.
- Community systems for helping at-risk youth are fragmented and do not coordinate services effectively. Students and their families are responsible for letting agencies know what other services they are accessing. There is no centralized way for agencies to communicate with each other about the clients they are serving. A centralized database for shared case management and a "one stop" center for youth services would facilitate coordination of services.
- In order to coordinate services more effectively and to improve service referrals, families, schools and community organizations would benefit from comprehensive, current information about services for at-risk youth.

Schools Cannot Do It Alone

According to author Jamie Vollmer, when schools were originally formed, it was assumed that families and churches bore the major responsibility for raising a child. Schools stayed focused on education for 260 years. At the beginning of this century, society began adding additional responsibilities to schools, most of which are mandated by state legislative action or the federal government. The trend of increasing the responsibilities of public schools has accelerated ever since. Schools are often seen as the logical place because they reach such large numbers of children and families.

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) points out that problems leading to school dropout are complex and require comprehensive solutions. Students who drop out need help not just from schools, but also from parents, businesses, and the entire community. Local resource people identified the following ways the community can help address school drop out:

- Recognize and acknowledge that the school drop out problem exists and its affect on the community. While

greater attention is being paid to school drop out recently, this issue has not received a high priority in the past.

- Improve access to services that support the basic needs of low-income students and their families, such as access to technology, health care, childcare, food and counseling.
- Increase community services for youth and their families that address the specific challenges adolescents face. For example:
 - Psychiatric crisis center for youth, a “safe place” for children in domestic crisis, residential and day treatment facilities for youth.
 - Respite services for parents who are caring for two generations of dependents (children and parents) so they have more time to spend helping their children with schoolwork
- Sarasota County has a rich social, economic, and political life that can support real-world learning and provide youth with positive role models. Groups such as business, government, health care, and community members can enrich the school environment through volunteerism.
- Agencies such as the Department of Labor, Department of Children and Families, foster care agencies, juvenile justice and others could improve service levels to better meet the needs of the families they serve.
- The community could help students by celebrating their successes and focusing on the positive aspects of youth ~~instead of problems. The community can support students and schools by attending school functions and being involved in school activities, even if they don’t have children.~~

Strategies and Programs

The NDPC/N has identified 15 effective strategies that have the most positive impact on the dropout rate, which have been implemented successfully at all education levels and environments throughout the nation. They fall into four areas:

- Early Interventions, including parent/family involvement, early childhood education and reading and writing programs
- Basic Core Strategies, including mentoring/tutoring; service learning, which combines community service with learning activities; alternative schooling, and out of school experiences
- Making the Most of Instruction, including professional development, providing instruction that responds to multiple learning styles, instructional technologies, and individualized instruction
- Making the Most of the Wider School Community, including a continuous process of evaluating school goals and objectives to improve learning, community collaboration, career education/workforce readiness and violence prevention/conflict resolution

The NDPC/N points out that helping students stay in school requires multi-dimensional solutions. These strategies can be stand alone programs, but provide better results when developed as part of a district wide or school program improvement plan that encompasses most or all of them.

Efforts in Sarasota County to reduce student drop out and improve students’ academic success incorporate many of these strategies. This study did not include an in depth analysis of every program offered by each individual school and community organization. Programs identified by resource speakers and published materials as model programs were discussed and are presented in Appendix B by way of example. Resource speakers observed that there are many effective programs being offered by schools and community organizations, but they are not being promoted or utilized on a district wide basis.

Early Childhood Education and Care

Pre-natal and early childhood health, childcare and preschool experiences, and parental involvement can all affect a child’s future academic success. Each county in the state of Florida has a School Readiness Coalition (SRC), which uses state and federal funds primarily for low-income and abused children. The SRC consists of childcare professionals, educators, community leaders, business professionals, representatives from child care programs and parents. The coalition administers the majority of funding for childcare programs in Sarasota County. It also oversees existing programs including Even Start, Head Start, pre-

kindergarten, subsidized childcare, and private-provider programs and works to educate and inform families about early development and the importance of learning in the first five years

Prenatal Health/Pre-literacy - The Healthy Start Coalition of Sarasota County offers several initiatives that target women and infants at-risk for poor outcomes. Two programs specifically support pre-literacy activities:

- Born to Read teaches mothers to read to babies before birth, sing, create rhythms and establish the sound of her voice. The program supports pre-literacy activities through the use of public library resources.
- Healthy Steps, which focuses on pediatric primary care for ages birth – 3, incorporates *Reach Out and Read*. This pre-literacy/literacy program in which children receive a new book at each well-child visit with a prescription for reading 20 minutes each day.

Quality Preschool and Childcare - According to the NDPC/N, The most effective way to reduce the number of children who will ultimately drop out is to provide the best possible classroom instruction from the beginning of their school experience, yet many Sarasota County kindergarteners enter school not prepared to learn.

Research supports that children who attend quality preschool programs are less likely to drop out of high school and experience other benefits as well. Thirty-year follow-up data from the High/Scope Perry Preschool program compared disadvantaged preschoolers who participated in a quality preschool program with those who did not. The results

are summarized in Table 13. Cost – benefit projections from the project indicate that that quality preschool may save almost eight times its cost in taxpayer dollars and generate additional tax revenues of \$8,847 per participant.

Research shows that a high ratio of children to childcare workers results in primarily custodial care with few activities that prepare children for school. Most childcare in Florida is unregulated (40%). However, Sarasota County has a higher standard than the state and is one of seven counties with a local ordinance that requires every childcare facility to be licensed.

There is a strong movement nationally to push for accredited childcare providers. Sarasota County has established a target of 100 accredited sites by 2005 to help meet the needs of Sarasota County. The YMCA Children’s Services Gold Seal Project brings child care programs to accreditation. As of February 2003, there were 29 accredited sites and another 35 in process.

Barriers and Opportunities for Improvement

Barriers to quality pre-school and childcare cited by resource speakers include:

- Lack of trained, certified staff and lack of resources on the part of providers to provide training. Sarasota County has approximately 400 credentialed child development professionals.
- Low wages and high turnover. Efforts are underway to increase the salaries of staff in participating childcare centers.

Table 13. Quality Preschool		
With Preschool	Outcome	Without Preschool
71%	EDUCATION More preschool participants graduated from high school or equivalent by age 27	54%
15%	SPECIAL EDUCATION Non-preschoolers were more than twice as likely to attend a special education program	34%
15%	WELFARE Half as many preschool participants were on welfare	32%
7%	CRIME Preschool participants had fewer arrests	35%
Source: Florida's Children; Their Future is in Our Hands, 1997		

- Long and demanding accreditation process
- Providers cannot afford to reduce classroom sizes because of the loss in tuition. They cannot pass increased costs to parents because many already spend nearly one-third of their income for childcare.

Resource speakers suggested the following improvements to early childhood programs:

- Strategies to promote infant and toddler well-being be made part of the school readiness policy agenda including expansion of existing federal programs like Early Head Start and enhance family support services in settings like pediatric offices and child care centers.
- Increase home visiting services to help parents provide an educationally enriched home environment.
- Additional resources are needed to speed up the process of accrediting quality childcare programs in order to reduce or eliminate the long waiting lists of quality childcare programs.
- In November 2002, a referendum was passed requiring the state to offer voluntary, pre-kindergarten services to all four-year-olds in the state. If fully funded, 70% of four-year-old children are expected to register. Goals of the program, which is still in the design phase, are lower staff to child ratios, lower class size, and higher staff credentials and approved curriculums for pre-school programs in Florida. Community wide support would help move this initiative forward.

Parental Involvement

According to the National Parent Teacher Association, the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is the extent to which the student's family is able too:

- Create a home environment that encourages learning
- Communicate high but reasonable expectations for their children's achievement
- Become involved in their children's education at school and in the community

Recent research (Fager and Brewster, March 1999) shows that:

- When parents are involved, students achieve more regardless of socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, or parents' education level.
- Schools' efforts to promote parent involvement are more significant than parental income and level of education in determining if parents become engaged.
- The most effective form of parent involvement is to engage parents in working directly with their children in learning activities at home.

Students, parents, and schools all benefit from parental involvement in education:

- Students exhibit improved academic performance, improved school behaviors, greater academic motivation and lower dropout rates.
- Parents feel better about themselves, gain new ideas to help their children learn and have a positive rapport with schools.
- Teachers and schools experience better parent and community relationships and greater support.

One goal of the Sarasota County School District's Campaign for Excellence is to actively engage parents and the community in meaningful partnerships. This goal is measured by parents' and community members' perceptions

Table 14. 2002 Parent Climate Survey - Sarasota County Schools

2002 Parent Climate Survey	Elementary	Middle	High
Survey Return Rate	9% - 30%	4% - 21%	12% - 25%
Percent Strongly Agree/Agree	73% - 84%	62% - 68%	50% - 59%

Source: 2002 Campaign for Excellence Climate Survey, Parents
Note: The results do not include schools for special students.

of schools as welcoming places that encourage active participation in learning. Parents' perceptions are measured using the Sarasota County Schools Parent Climate Survey.

Table 14 reports the parent climate survey return rate for 2002 and the percentages of parents that agree with positive statements about opportunities for parent involvement in their children's education, school/teacher/parent communication, parent involvement in decisions affecting the school, how easy it is to meet with teachers and

principals, and overall satisfaction. The specific statements are different for high school climate surveys.

Some school districts, like Charlotte County, coordinate family involvement programs at the district level. There is not a district level coordinator in Sarasota County. However, the district recently began providing voluntary training for all school administrators, staff and community organizations about how to develop successful family involvement programs. Training is also available to community organizations. There are district-wide parent education activities, for example, the “Believe In All Your Possibilities” campaign, an alcohol and tobacco prevention program for parents of middle school students.

In Sarasota County Public Schools, efforts to involve parents in their children’s education take place at the school level. School district representatives indicate that the level of

“Parents don’t pay enough attention to their kids anymore. It’s because of changing environments...business and what not, but it’s a lot harder to get an education when your parents aren’t forcing or pushing you to do better.”

GED Student, The Stories Project

family involvement varies by school, as does the need for family-involvement programs. Parental involvement programs that provide parent education related to their child’s learning program and developmental needs are offered at every school. Families and Schools Together (FAST) and Family Literacy are two parental involvement programs that serve Sarasota County and are based on national models (see Appendix B). These programs target at-risk elementary school students and their families and are available at no cost to eligible families.

Parents can also become involved through parent teacher conferences, volunteer involvement in school activities, Parent Teacher Association’s and Parent teacher Organizations, and serving on School Advisory Councils. The School Board of Sarasota County reports that more than 12,000 volunteers, both individuals and businesses, were registered to participate in Sarasota County Public Schools during the 2002-2003 school year.

Barriers and Opportunities for Improvement:

Resource speakers and supporting research indicate the following regarding parent and family involvement in their children’s education:

- The tendency is to emphasize family involvement in schools at the elementary level. However, research shows that the benefits of involving parents are not confined to the early years. There are significant gains at all ages and in all grades. Students and schools would benefit from parental involvement at all levels of public education.
- In order to engage parents of at-risk students, family involvement programs should be offered at times and locations that allow working parents to participate, such as Saturday mornings and evenings. Local employers could be encouraged to provide release time to participate in children’s school activities and educational programs.
- Make staff/programs available through home visits or by offering programs at neighborhood or community sites.
- Educate parents about issues related to middle school to high school transitions.
- Provide more support for the specific needs of families for whom English is a second language. Incorporate cultural diversity concepts and help parents navigate the public school system.
- Provide childcare for parents with young children and conduct activities in multiple languages as a way to make parent involvement activities more accessible.
- Utilize existing, successful programs more widely throughout the district.

Mentoring

North West Regional Educational Laboratory (On Request, “Student Mentoring,” September 1998) provides a broad definition of mentoring as a sustained one-to-one relationship between a caring adult, or older student, and a child who needs support to achieve academic, career, social, or personal goals. Planned mentoring relationships involve matching a young person with a mentor through a structured program with specific goals and objectives. Mentoring programs are a way for schools to provide more individual attention, guidance and encouragement to students without

placing greater demands on classroom teachers who are already being asked to support increasingly diverse student needs.

The report provides a summary of research that examined both school-based and private mentoring programs for youth. Some of the key benefits for students include a decreased likelihood of dropping out of school, improved school performance, enhanced self-confidence and self esteem and better relationships with peers, teachers and parents. Mentored students also had a heightened career awareness and improved ability to make vocational and educational choices. The report also points out that mentoring programs targeting low-performing and at-risk students are most effective when offered in conjunction with other social and academic services geared toward improving student performance and addressing students' individual needs.

A Child Trends Research Brief (February 2002) highlighting the results of multiple studies of youth mentoring programs indicates that:

- When compared with non-program youth, youth in one mentoring program skipped half as many days of school and in another program, youth gained more than a week of attended classes.
- Mentored youth were 46% less likely than youth in the control group to initiate drug use and 27% less likely to initiate alcohol use during the period of the study. The impact for minority youth was even greater, with 70% less likely to initiate drug use than other similar minority youth who were not in the program.

Big Brothers/Big Sisters (BBBS) serves an average of 850 children each year in Sarasota, Manatee and Charlotte counties. BBBS estimates that there are approximately 3,500 children in Sarasota County who need mentoring assistance and that on average, 100 children are waiting to be matched with a mentor. A national study by BBBS shows that children matched with a BBBS volunteer are 75% less likely to drop out of school. A local study showed that:

- 93% had improved academic performance
- 92% showed improved school attendance
- 99% were promoted to the next grade and
- 96% showed behavioral improvements

The School Board of Sarasota County has interagency agreements to provide mentors in the district with four local agencies:

- Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Sun Coast, Inc.
- Take Stock in Children
- Volunteer Connections
- Jewish Family and Children's Services of Sarasota-Manatee, Inc.

These agencies require both national (fingerprinting) and state criminal background checks and interview, screen and place volunteer mentors. They also conduct follow-up services.

The decision to offer school-based mentoring to students is made by each school. The majority of Sarasota County public middle schools and high schools offer some form of mentoring program. There are many civic organizations, alumni groups, non-profit agencies and other community groups that offer mentoring to youth. These organizations often rely on the school system to help identify youth who need mentoring. Appendix B provides example of mentoring programs offered by schools.

Resource speakers noted that communication with parents or guardians, input from the schools, (volunteers and business) are all needed to create successful mentoring programs. Students would benefit from a variety of types of mentors including peers, teachers, and other caring adults.

Barriers and Opportunities for Improvement:

Barrier to engaging mentors cited by resource speakers include:

- Liability is a concern among volunteer mentors. Having students and mentors meet on school grounds under the supervision of program staff is the easiest way to limit liability. However, this also limits the privacy and the range of activities available to mentors and mentees. There are ways that schools can address liability concerns if students and mentors meet off-site that should be addressed as part of the program design. (North West Regional Educational Laboratory, On Request, "Student Mentoring," September 1998)

- Background checks are required and necessary but can take several months to complete. As a result, some potential mentors lose interest in the program.
- Misperceptions that youth mentors should be a certain age and that there are big time commitments. There is a need for mentors of varying ages and backgrounds to support the individual needs of each student.

Opportunities for improved mentoring programs cited by resource speakers and identified in published materials include:

- Engage local business in supporting mentoring programs. In addition to providing career and academic mentoring, employers could offer release time to participating employees or discounts and gift certificates for mentors to help offset their expenses.
- Although many organizations and individuals are involved in mentoring, there are many youth who need mentoring.
- It is valuable to have a mentor with the same ethnic or racial background. However, there are not enough ethnic and minority mentors in the schools.
- In order to be successful, mentoring programs should:
 - Be carefully designed with specific goals and objectives
 - Provide close supervision and well-defined parameters for the mentoring relationship
 - Ensure parental support and school and community involvement in all phases of the program

After School Programs

There is evidence that the number of students in the U.S. left without some kind of adult supervision after school is large and growing.

- There are over 28 million children in the U.S. with parents who work outside the home.
- Between 1970 and 1990, the proportion of American children under 18 whose mothers are in the labor force rose from 39% to 62%.

- The average American child spends 900 hours a year in school and 1,500 hours watching television. Many of these hours watching TV take place after school. Often TV is the only after school care available to the working poor.
- According to the 2000 U.S. Census, in Sarasota County, 71% of children ages six to 17 have both parents in the labor force and the custodial parent in 85% of single parent households works.

Nationally, there is a lack of quality after school options for many students and their families. As of 1999, the estimated demand for school-based after school programs exceeded supply by two to one. There is evidence that schools are beginning to respond to this need and national studies indicate a high level of public support for quality after school programs.

Researchers identify several benefits to students of after school programs:

- Increased learning due to improved academic achievement and enhanced reading ability
- Improved school attendance and reduced drop-out rate
- Reduced in-grade retention and placement in special education classes
- Decreased risk of teen parenthood and decreased likelihood of substance abuse.
- Improved social skills and behaviors that resulted in fewer disciplinary incidents at school and fewer suspensions

Benefits of after school programs for the school and the community include:

- Decreased vandalism and delinquency. Because juvenile crime peaks during after school hours, structured, supervised after school activities result in decreased juvenile crime, violent victimization of youth, and school vandalism.
- Better use of community facilities such as libraries and parks and more effective use of funding
- Increased involvement on the part of parents, businesses and others in the community

In the Sarasota School District, several schools have used a variety of funding services to provide before and after school academic support programs. The 21st Century Community Learning program is a program funded by the U. S. Department of Education to an educationally enriched environment after school that gives children and youth expanded learning opportunities in a safe, drug-free environment. The School Board of Sarasota County works in collaboration with other community organizations to provide program services at several schools in the district. Several middle schools and high schools also provide before and after-school teacher assistance and after school tutoring for students. Appendix B provides examples of after school programs available within the Sarasota Public School District.

Barriers and Opportunities for Improvement

Resource speakers identified the following barriers to after school programs:

- After school programs frequently change due to funding and related issues.
- Schools attempting to implement before and after school programs face challenges with student participation, transportation, teacher recruitment, and funding.
- High school students’ work schedules, the need for the student to be available at home to care for siblings, and lack of awareness among students and parents about available programs affect participation and attendance.

Educators, service providers and students all expressed the need for more after school programs, especially for students 9th through 12th grade, that extend their educational opportunities and are consistent with the school curricula. To be effective, after school programs should offer a variety of activities (recreational and educational) that are culturally relevant and are linked to students’ interests.

English as a Second Language

On a national level, the recently completed Hispanic Dropout Project provides recommendations for students, parents and families, schools and school staff, local and state policymakers, and institutions of higher education about improving the education of Hispanic students. It also provides a self-evaluation tool to help school staff, and district and state policymakers evaluate their own efforts to

educate youth, using the key recommendations of the Hispanic Dropout Project.

The state of Florida requires that English as a Second Language (ESOL) be offered at every school. Students are taught social language then continue learning academic language throughout their formal education. All teachers teaching English and those teaching elementary students are required to attend ESOL classes designed to teach teachers.

The first time a student enrolls in the Sarasota County School system they are given a home language survey to determine if they need to access ESOL Services. All high school students identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) are enrolled in an ESOL program. Each school has an ESOL Liaison to assist students and their families work through the public school system. There is also one bi-lingual Parent Liaison who is a school district employee that conducts home and classroom visits as needed.

Barriers and Opportunities for Improvement

Resource speakers identified the following:

- The state of Florida requires ESOL high school students to take the regular 24 credits of core courses while they complete their ESOL classes and learn a second language. They must also pass the FCAT prior to graduation. Currently federal guidelines allow students classified as LEP to be exempted from standard testing

Table 15. Support Services Personnel - Sarasota School District			
Type of Personnel	District Total	Language Other Than English	
		Spanish	Other*
Psychologists	16	1	2
Social Workers	9	1	
Guidance Counselors	74	3	5
School Nurses	7	2	
Home School Liaisons	4	1	
*Portuguese, Croatian, Russian, Greek, French, Hebrew, Tagalog Source: Sarasota County School Board, Student Support Services			

if they have been in this country for less than one year. It was suggested that given the amount of time it takes to acquire English language skills, this should be increased to a minimum of two years.

- Hispanic students make up 8% of the student population and 1.7% of the schools instructional staff (includes teachers and guidance counselors) are Hispanic.
- There is a shortage of bi-lingual support services staff for LEP students see (Table 15). The Sheriffs Office supplies School Resource Officers (SROs), and none are bi-lingual.
- In Sarasota County, there is a shortage of bi-lingual professionals in community organization providing services to Hispanics.
- Middle schools focus on academic remediation and behavioral interventions. Disruptive behaviors typically begin to appear in middle school.
- High schools focused on ninth grade transition teams and dropout prevention programs. Some students have difficulty transitioning from the more structured middle school environment to the more open, flexible high school environment. This, combined with other developmental issues, can cause students' performance at school to decline.

Academic Remediation

According to the NDPC/N, early interventions to help low-achieving students recognize that focusing on reading and writing is the foundation for effective learning in all other areas are an important component of effective dropout prevention. The Sarasota School District reports that approximately 20% of 1st grade students are identified by classroom teachers as performing below grade level in reading. A much lower percent of 1st grade students, approximately 8%, are identified as performing below grade level in mathematics. The Sarasota School Board is analyzing a variety of characteristics of students who have dropped out, including achievement in reading in lower grade levels to determine if it is a key factor. The school district is also working on a comprehensive plan for implementing screening and diagnostic measures of reading to students during grades K-2, particularly for those struggling with reading. The goal would be to tie these measures to instructional adjustments by the teacher.

Within the school system, there are efforts taking place at all levels of K-12 education to provide remediation to improve academic performance of low-achieving students. Supplemental Academic Instruction Funds (SAI) are used to fund strategies to assist students who fail to meet achievement levels required for promotion or who score a level one on the FCAT. SAI funds are used primarily for staff and fund programs that vary by school, but in general:

- Elementary schools focus on remediation and improving academic achievement. Funds are used primarily for teachers and resource teachers. Resource teachers identify and work with those students needing remedial help to improve their academic achievement and get on grade level.

Remediation is provided for students who fail to meet achievement levels required for promotion. An Academic Improvement Plan (AIP) is required for each student needing remediation. The goal is to bring students to grade level through remediation as quickly as possible. There are number of factors that can influence a students progress and sometimes it takes longer than the school year. A combination of approaches are used by Sarasota County Public Schools to bring students up to grade level including:

- Individualized tutoring and instruction
- Small group remedial instruction
- Reduced class sizes/smaller teacher to student ratios
- Instructional technologies, which provide alternative methods of learning for those who struggle to learn using traditional methods.

High school students are promoted to the next grade when credit requirements are earned. Students in danger of not meeting high school graduation requirements within the traditional four-year program receive special assistance as necessary. Students who do not meet the required score on the state test required for graduation are provided remedial or supplemental instruction until the minimum expectations are met. In addition, dropout prevention programs that are competency based are available to high school students at Riverview, Venice and Sarasota High Schools. Competency-based credit focuses on showing mastery of academic material. These dropout prevention programs provide individualized learning and the opportunity to catch-up. High school students age 16 and older can also make-up credits by attending adult high school courses in the evening and during the summer.

During the course of the study, a proposed alternative school was under consideration by the district that focused on

providing intensive remediation for low performing students. The Partnership for Alternative Communities in Technology (P.A.C.T.) was to be a public/private partnership. The PACT program would have provided an alternative school to serve 1,000 low performing students in 6th through 12th grades, in two separate school facilities. The decision was made not to pursue this program, but the school district is considering alternatives for accomplishing the goals of the program.

Barriers and Opportunities for Improvement

Local educators and other resource people expressed the following regarding the community's ability to provide adequate remediation:

- The emphasis on standardized testing prevents teachers and guidance counselors from having time to spend counseling and tutoring students.
- The state does not provide the resources to support the remediation needed to acquire the mandated levels of achievement.
- There is an increasing need for financial support for tutoring programs, training for teachers in guided reading strategies, additional reading teachers and an increase in volunteer mentors and tutors, especially at the elementary level.
- Several years ago, state funding for dropout prevention was rolled into Supplemental Academic Instruction (SAI) funds resulting in decreased funds per student. As a result, summer school and some dropout prevention programs were eliminated. Resource speakers indicated that there are not enough opportunities for remediation during the summer and outside of school hours to meet the needs of students who are performing below grade level.

Curriculum and Instruction

Educators who provided information to the SCOPE Study Group identified the need for fundamental changes in how students are taught and cited the following as important considerations for reducing school dropout:

- Changes in instruction methods that recognize the needs of individual students and their varying learning styles

- Increase the relevance of learning and provide learning opportunities that support students with vocational-technical goals.

Learning Styles and Individualized Instruction – Research has shown that not everyone learns the same way and that each person has the ability to develop multiple intelligences, which include:

- The ability to use both oral and written language to communicate.
- The ability to use abstract thought, inductive/deductive reasoning and mathematical and logic to solve abstract problems.
- Sensitivity to music and sounds within one's environment.
- The capacity to perceive things in visual images (form, color, shapes and texture).
- Reliance on the whole body to express ideas and feelings and using the hands to produce things.
- Interpersonal (sensitivity to others) and intrapersonal (ability to know and assess oneself).
- The ability to recognize and classify nature

The NDPC/Network points out the following about the importance of responding to various learning styles and providing opportunities for individualized instruction:

- Children have diverse learning styles, learn at different rates, have varying socioeconomic backgrounds, and have diverse intellectual strengths.
- Each child is unique and individualized programs can increase student success. Individualized instruction is especially effective in working with at-risk students.
- When educators show students that there are different ways to learn, students find new and creative ways to solve problems, achieve success, and become lifelong learners. When educators consider varying learning styles to teach the curriculum, they find more students achieve success.
- Dropout statistics show that numerous so-called "normal" students are not succeeding because they are

not treated as individuals (Stainback & Stainback, 1992). By not recognizing the unique learning needs of students, these students do not have the opportunity to achieve their potential (Pugach & Warger, 1996). Because they do not learn like everyone else, they often see themselves, as do their teachers, as failures.

According to the NDPC/Network, individualized instruction provides the opportunity for students to learn at their own pace, in their own way and be successful. While individualized plans are established for students requiring remediation, most teachers do not have the time to provide individualized instruction for all their students. Other ways to individualize instruction include:

- Mentoring and tutoring
- Provide academic intervention when students first have difficulty
- Counseling and social services
- Instructional strategies that address various learning styles and intelligences
- Alternative school options
- Instructional technology

According to Sarasota School Board representatives, current research indicates that teachers can best meet the needs of all students by using instructional strategies that incorporate all student-learning styles. Professional development in research-based instructional strategies is provided to Sarasota school district instructional staff throughout the school year.

Current efforts to individualize learning include magnet programs like the Booker Visual and Performing Arts Program, which channel students into areas of interest and skill. These programs provide unique opportunities for students to develop a special talent area. Dropout prevention programs and alternative schools use a more individualized approach to instruction as well.

Academic Relevance, Career Education and Workforce Readiness - The inability to tie what is being learned in school to work and other life experiences was cited by educators, students, and other resource people as contributing to student drop out. Educators stressed that it is important for students to think about where they are going

early in life and that schools should have a dual focus of academic preparation and career exploration and planning.

Research indicates that students with low motivation to attend school have shown improvements in attendance and less incidence of drop out after participating in career education and vocational programs. The literature contains examples of career and vocational programs that have been successful in preventing student dropout or helping dropouts re-enroll and complete high school. (Naylor, 1987).

According to a representative of the Suncoast Workforce Board, career and vocational education for youth and workforce development efforts help students understand the relevance of what they are learning to their future in the workforce. By helping the students make these connections, the students are more likely to be interested in their education, see its value and reduce the likelihood they will drop out of school.

The following are examples of efforts that are taking place in Sarasota County to make academics more relevant and to incorporate career and vocational education into the curriculum:

- Within the K-12 public schools, career exploration activities are included in the instructional program at all levels. These activities may take the form of job shadowing, career fairs, career speakers, career exploration software, etc. There are career interest inventories and career exploration activities supported through district-adopted programs.
- At the high school level, career academies have been developed in several schools and this concept will be expanded over the next few years. The school district is also investigating how to provide vocational technical opportunities to high school students and the establishment of a technical high school for 9th through 12th grades is under study.
- Sarasota County Technical Institute (SCTI) offers a High School Career Academy program for high school students (juniors and seniors) that incorporate academics, technology and real work experience. All students receive their high school diploma from their home school and graduate with their class. The program

currently offers a full day and a half day option, but the full day option is being eliminated.

- The First Jobs/First Wages Council of Suncoast Workforce Board (SWB) oversees the Board's Youth Programs. These programs promote successful entry into the workforce through education and workforce experience and encourage the development of career programming for area youth. Typically, youth must be at-risk and from economically disadvantaged families to participate.
- The Business-to-School sub-committee of the High Skills/High Wages Council is specifically focused on the development of career academies in the high schools that are tied to the specific needs of the local business community.

Barriers and Opportunities for Improvement:

Resource speakers cited the following barriers to obtaining career and vocational education:

- The student to counselor ratio in the high schools is very high, making it difficult to educate and counsel students about various options available. As a result, students may not be aware of existing opportunities.
- There are logistical problems with coordinating regular school requirements with currently available technical and vocational programming, which can lead to frustration and deter students from using these programs.
- Lack of transportation, especially from outlying areas of the county, is a barrier to attending SCTI and other vocational-technical programs.
- There are misperceptions that SCTI is for students who cannot qualify for college. SCTI students are required to achieve the same academic standards as those in traditional high school. Program entrance requirements conform to reading and math levels set by the FDOE for adults. Students must be on or close to grade level in reading and math to access the programs. Vocational technical school is not synonymous with dropout prevention.

Resources speakers identified opportunities for improvement in career and vocational education:

- A consistent and coordinated approach at all schools, including elementary schools, to providing career awareness to career development programs, including career counseling and coordinated work-based learning opportunities such as job shadowing, internships, etc.
- Incorporate career exploration activities into the curriculum to help students connect school-to-work at early grade levels
- Develop a countywide strategy that incorporates business and schools coming together to provide career and vocational experiences within the schools.
- Increase public awareness that SCTI is an alternative for students who want to pursue a vocational-technical occupation and change the public's perception that SCTI is for students who aren't able to qualify for college or who are potential dropouts.
- Improve the guidance counseling function so that students receive adequate counseling about all options that are available to them during and following high school.

Alternative Schooling

According to the NDPC/N, alternative schooling provides special attention to the student's individual social needs and the academic requirements for a high school diploma and provides an alternative to dropping out of traditional high school. Alternative schooling can take several forms. For example, schools within a school provide a separate location within the traditional school for students with academic or social behavior issues. Separate alternative schools are separated from regular schools and Schools of choice, like magnet schools offer different specialized learning opportunities. In addition to school choice, which allows parents to enroll their children in any public or charter school, magnet schools, private schools and home-schooling, the Sarasota County School District provides the following alternatives for students at risk of dropping out of school:

Dropout Prevention Programs - Teachers and counselors may refer students to these programs if they are falling behind academically and/or have difficulty adapting to a traditional high school structure. In 1994, The School Board of Sarasota County recommended that all district high schools offer a viable alternative education program to their students. There are two programs for youth at-risk of

dropping out, located in separate facilities on the campuses at New View at Riverview High School and New Deal at Venice High School High that address academics, attendance and behavior issues. Sarasota High School recently initiated the Anchor program to provide a similar alternative for eligible students.

"I left the regular high school cuz I wasn't staying on top of my academic skills. I was falling behind in grades and I figured this school would be better because it is a very, very closed campus so they'll know if you leave or not... You get along, you learn better, you make up your grades, you can basically get back on track."

Alternative School Student, The Stories Project

Alternative Schools - In the Sarasota public school system, these include:

- Cysis program for teen parents that also provides support services like parenting classes and childcare. Emphasis is placed on vocational and employability skills.
- Second Chance Schools are alternative schools for students who are non-compliant in their regular school, are recommended for expulsion by their school, or who are juvenile offenders referred through the Department of Juvenile Justice. There are currently five-second chance high schools and one second chance middle school in Sarasota County. Students are referred for truancy, habitually disruptive behaviors, behaviors that interfere with learning, and expellable offenses
- YMCA Character House (a second chance school) is a residential commitment facility that serves adjudicated pregnant girls from around the state.

The success of alternative schooling is attributed to small student to staff ratios and underlying philosophies of the "whole student approach," student accountability, behavior modification, and tailoring learning to the individual's needs and learning style. Program staff typically works with the family and service providers in the community to help students get the services they need to address issues like substance abuse, physical or sexual abuse, and anger management.

Barriers and Opportunities for Improvement:

When asked about effective dropout prevention efforts in Sarasota County, half of the educators who responded to an informal opinion survey commented on the effectiveness of both dropout prevention programs and alternative schools. Survey respondents also suggested that:

- More middle and high schools should offer dropout prevention programs
- More effort should be made to refer at-risk students to existing programs

Truancy Intervention Program

State law governs truancy to a large extent. However, each district develops its own policies and procedures for enforcement for complying with state mandates. A student who has 15 unexcused absences within 90 calendar days is a habitual truant under state law. Consequences include:

- The student may be referred to Children in Need of Services and Families in Need of Services (CINS/FINS). The goal of the program is prevention of behaviors leading to running away, being ungovernable or being truant. CINS/FINS counselors work with the schools and families to provide prevention programs and services.
- Students who are age 14-18 and who leave school prior to graduation or who are habitual truants who hold a Florida drivers license will have their license suspended. Students who have not yet received their license will be unable to obtain a license when they apply. If they re-enroll within 20 days or have 30 days with no unexcused absences, they can have their license reinstated.
- Parents and/or guardians may be subject to criminal prosecution
- If a student age 16-18 has not formally withdrawn from school, he/she is subject to attendance requirements.

School staff tracks attendance and contacts parents, as required by state law, to determine if the absence is excused. If a pattern of non-attendance is developing, school administration, an attendance worker and/or a student study team meet with the parents to identify potential remedies. If these efforts do not resolve the problem, interventions are implemented.

The Truancy Intervention program is a partnership between the Sarasota County School Board and the Sarasota Family YMCA. It is a prevention program that serves students ages 10-17, with a focus on middle school students. Staff works closely with school social workers to identify students with poor attendance and to keep them in school. In cooperation with the Sheriff's Department, truancy sweeps are run twice a year in which law enforcement agents locate and pick up youth that are not attending school.

There are currently four attendance workers; three serve the central district and support 32,500 students. Riverview High School chose to fund its own attendance worker, who supports 2,500 students. During the 2001-2002 school year, there were:

- 5,196 referrals to attendance workers to determine if absences were unexcused
- 1,392 cases of excessive unexcused absenteeism/truancy
- 990 drivers license suspensions for failures to attend school
- Last year, 20 cases were referred for prosecution; one parent was prosecuted.

The purpose of the program is to provide interventions in order to avoid going before a judge. As part of the intervention process, services can be recommended for both parents and students. If the family/student fails to comply with the recommendations, a petition is filed with the court system and the family goes before the court.

Currently, the state attorney's office is responsible for truancy enforcement in Sarasota County. The state attorney's office can impose sanctions, such as counseling for both the student and parents and forcing the student to go to school. Failure to comply with sanctions is considered contempt of court and can result in both fines and jail, but parents usually receive six months probation and parenting classes. Probation is the likely consequence for parents because if the parent is in jail, they cannot help the child.

Manatee County's truancy intervention program has demonstrated success in increasing student attendance. It is the only county in the state with a compulsory school age of 18. Together with strong truancy enforcement and taking parents to court for allowing their children to skip school, it has helped to reduce the number of Manatee County students

dropping out each year from 7.4% in 1999 to 4.5% in 2001 and the graduation rate increased from 56% to 68%. Student attendance improved with 94% of students absent fewer than 15 days.

During the course of the program, staff found that 25-30% of the reasons for not attending school were beyond the student's control and that many truant students stated they wanted to attend school but could not. Manatee County responded by offering an Internet high school curriculum, using a program called Ed Options that meets Florida curriculum standards. The program is now used as an alternative for students who are habitual truants and by schools to allow students to make up missed credit, for summer school options, to help bring 9th graders to grade level, and for FCAT preparation.

Manatee Public School staff responsible for the program cited the combination of strong enforcement and the compulsory school age of 18 is a significant factor in the program's success. Resource people noted that there is little incentive to pursue truants that are age of 16-18 because they can legally drop out of school.

Barriers and Opportunities for Improvement:

Resource speakers and educators identified the need for improvements in how Sarasota County enforces truancy and cited the following barriers and opportunities:

- There is not a consistent, effective attendance tracking system in all public schools. Local educators concurred that attendance tracking is a challenge for schools and that effective systems are costly. North Port High School is using a key card system that shows promise.
- The length of time from first contact with an attendance worker to the time the case goes before a judge varies depending on the case and can take up to three months.
- Few truancy petitions that are filed make it before a judge. Documentation requirements for preparing a case are overwhelming and few cases are prosecuted.

"It's really hard to be in a class full of kids and get the work done and get the attention you need. I remember going into my first class last year...they had to pull in more desks to get people to sit down."

Alternative School Student, The Stories Project

- Truancy laws are unclear and open to interpretation, which can lead to difficulty in enforcement and incentives and sanctions for students and parents are not strong enough.
- Efforts are needed to strengthen truancy enforcement and should involve the state attorney's office as well as the school district, teachers, CINS/FINS, and parents.
- There is currently not a truancy court or truancy officers dedicated to this problem and truancy sweeps do not occur on a regular basis.

Smaller Learning Communities (SLC)

Sarasota County's high schools have been experimenting with alternative schedules and structures, along with expanding career education for several years. Sarasota County School Board representatives report that each high school has implemented at least one program innovation,

The problem is that some students need individual [help], not a big group [that] needs help on one problem. Cause some students may get it, some students may not. Some people sit there and like, they have no idea what is going on.

Alternative School Student, The Stories Project

such as block scheduling, career academies, a 9th grade academy, magnet programs, and community service/internship programs.

The school district recognizes the need to reform its large high schools. In response, it has initiated the Small Learning Communities project, which is intended to more effectively meet the needs of all students while improving high schools' graduation rates and rates of college enrollment. Research supports that (Cotton, 1996) for students of all achievement levels and in all kinds of settings, small schools have proven superior to large schools on most measures of student performance, including higher attendance and lower dropout rates. This initiative provides for a more personalized education that integrates academic and career-related curriculum. As a result of this change, Sarasota high schools will be complexes of many small schools within single large campuses, each with a focus and specialty. Each small school's staff will consist of 20 or fewer educators, which

will make it possible to focus more on individual students and provide a personalized learning environment.

Implementation strategies are being developed for each school. Implementation will take place over a three-year period to be completed by 2005. Each of Sarasota County's high schools will be restructured to incorporate several features including the following:

- Ninth grade transition teams to assist students adjust to high school
- Career Academies, which are characterized by integrated curriculum, flexible scheduling, business partnerships/job shadowing/internships, post-secondary linkages, and academy-based parent – teacher organizations
- Four-year career/academic success plans for students entering high school and a dual career/academic focus
- Redesigned advising/guidance and mentoring to provide more intensive and frequent monitoring of student progress and counseling activities for at-risk students, especially in 9th and 10th grades
- Job shadowing, internship and community service as an integral component of the instructional program

Some of the expected benefits include:

- Improved academic performance in reading, writing, and mathematics and on the FCAT and college entrance exams (PSAT, ACT and SAT)
- An increase in the number of students completing high school with a standard diploma
- A decrease in the incidences of student violence, suspensions and expulsions, and alcohol and drug use
- An increase in average daily attendance
- Improvements in the learning environment, including personalization, student engagement, real-world immersion and future/career-focus

The SLC approach takes the positive characteristic of dropout prevention programs and incorporates them into the high school structure. Evidence shows that dropout rates

are significantly lower in small schools. Resource people expressed support for this initiative and suggested that characteristics of this program be extended below 9th grade. All high schools have initiated freshman transition programs and are working on the next stages of implementation. Each school will develop programs to meet the specific needs of the school's student population.

Evaluation of Dropout Prevention Efforts

The NDPC/N notes that, in general, research, and evaluation of alternative schools and dropout prevention programs and the effect they have on student retention and academic achievement is very limited. Program successes are reported through collections of anecdotes, with little or no “hard data” collected or analyzed. The Florida Department of Education has recently developed *The Quality Standards for Dropout Prevention Programs*, an evaluation document to measure the impact of local alternative schools and dropout prevention programs.

Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. conducted an evaluation of the U.S. Department of Education’s School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program. The study looked at a range of questions including whether programs kept students in school. All the programs evaluated shared two features. More than regular schools, they tried to help students overcome personal, family and social barriers that interfered with their ability to go to school and do well there, using counseling as the primary approach. They also tried to create smaller and more personal settings in which students could feel secure and learn more effectively. The authors make the following observations:

- Risk factors do not predict exactly who will be a dropout. Some dropouts have no risk factors, and some students with many risk factors stay in school. Identifying who should receive dropout prevention services is a challenging task.
- The study suggests that the choice of teachers in alternative schools was more important than the choice of curriculum.
- Communities and school districts that take the term dropout prevention most literally set up programs for students in middle school or earlier grades. To prevent dropping out, interventions must begin before students

are so far behind academically and alienated from school emotionally that dropping out is inevitable.

- Dropout prevention programs for high school students that lead to a high school diploma were more likely to be effective with students who demonstrate the potential to succeed (motivated to complete or with high academic potential).
- Restructuring schools has more promise when it focuses on changing the classroom experience rather than on providing dropout-prevention services.
- Program models should be selected based on the nature of the dropout problem locally and that dropout prevention programs will likely yield weak results unless we know why students are dropping out.

The annual needs assessment done by each school in the Sarasota School District looks at internal data, what the benefits and outcomes have been for both the students and the school. This information is used to as the basis to either continue, revise or discontinue specific programs. Information about the number of students served, program cost and results is not readily available at the district level. Currently there is no formal mechanism for sharing information about the dropout prevention programs and strategies being used or their success among various schools.

Community organizations serving at-risk youth typically maintain data about clients served and outcomes realized by program participants. However, the nature of the information varies by program making comparisons difficult.

School district representatives acknowledge that more formal evaluation is needed to assess the effectiveness of dropout prevention efforts and have indicated that a plan is being developed to provide a more formalized structure for the monitoring and evaluating of DOP programs and the sharing of best practices among schools. While this study was taking place an evaluation of alternative schools in the

Table 16. Sources of Financial Support 2000-2001			
Source	State	Local	Federal
State Average	50%	41%	9%
Sarasota District	20%	75%	5%
Source: Florida Department of Education			

Sarasota school district was underway. The results were not available during the course of the study.

FUNDING FOR DROPOUT PREVENTION

Financial support for public education in Florida comes from state, local and federal sources. Funds for state support school districts are provided primarily by legislative appropriations. Local revenue is derived primarily from property taxes. School districts receive funds from the federal government through the state, which administers the funds. School districts may also receive federal funds directly from various state agencies.

In the state of Florida, counties with low property values get more in state tax dollars than those with high property values, like Sarasota County. As a result, Sarasota County contributes more in local dollars to education. Table 16 compares the proportion of funds received from these sources for all districts in the state and for the Sarasota School District.

Public school funding for dropout prevention comes primarily from Supplemental Academic Instruction (SAI) funds and general revenue. Prior to the 1999-2000 school year, public school funding for dropout prevention efforts addressed 4th through 12th grade students who were below achievement level in reading and math; retained students, those with poor attendance or poor behavior. State funds for dropout prevention, summer school and class size reduction were rolled into SAI funds in 1999. SAI funds

are a component of the state and local Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) dollars received by each school district. This change led to the elimination of summer school and some dropout prevention efforts in the Sarasota School District and lead to decreasing state funds per student for dropout prevention. A recently passed local referendum has allowed the district to re-institute many remedial programs that had been eliminated due to budget deficits.

There are specified permitted uses for SAI funds. Funds are available for K-12 education. The district specifies how the funds are being used and reports this to the state. The state formula for determining the district's allocation is based on the reported weighted full-time equivalency (WFTE) of students. Any increase in the allocation is related to student growth in the district. The schools receive their allocation from the district based on the percent of students on free and reduced lunch (80%) and their WFTE (20%). Table 17 shows how SAI funds were distributed to elementary, middle and high schools for the 2002-2003 school year.

In addition to SAI funds, there is funding available through a variety of sources to support programs that encourage at-risk-youth to complete their high school education. These range from entitlement funds through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act - Title 1 to competitive federal and state grants and support for specific programs by local foundations. Appendix C provides a description of some of the major sources of funding for dropout prevention, remediation and programs for at-risk youth. It is not intended to be an exhaustive discussion of K-12 public school funding or funding for dropout prevention and at-risk youth programs.

**Table 17. Supplemental Academic Instruction Funding
Sarasota County - 2002-2003**

Purpose	Amount	Percent
Elementary Schools	\$4,130,940	53%
Middle Schools	\$1,396,476	18%
High Schools	\$2,012,986	26%
Charter Schools	\$223,428	3%
Dept. of Juveniel Justice Schools	\$50,675	1%

Source: School Board of Sarasota County

Representatives from the school district, local human services agencies and social services cited adequate levels of funding and on-going support as challenges for initiating and sustaining programs for dropout prevention, remediation and at-risk youth. Reductions in federal and state funding

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions express the value judgments of the Study Group, based on the findings.

1. School dropout is a major problem and our community has not made it a priority concern.

Data indicates that school dropout is a major problem in Sarasota County with more than 1,600 high school students dropping out between 1997-2001. Historically, the community has been unaware that there are many at-risk youth. The tendency has been to attribute drop out to failures on the part of students rather than failures on the part of various community systems.

Adequate resources have not been dedicated to the school dropout problem. Furthermore, it has not received priority attention at the state or local levels. The current level of funding for dropout prevention has not been enough to address the problem satisfactorily.

Society has added many additional responsibilities to schools that extend beyond their original focus of teaching basic academic skills. This trend has accelerated over the past several decades with schools being mandated to serve a range of non-academic needs, for example, health and psychological services, breakfast and lunch programs and personal safety programs. As a result, schools are overwhelmed with activities that detract from their core purpose of educating children.

2. Every dropout has a different story – there is not one solution.

School dropout is a complex problem and is a process, not an event. Many of the factors that contribute to a student's decision to drop out are not related to school. Among the most significant non-school related contributing factors in Sarasota County are:

- **Poverty** - Poverty is highly correlated with many of the risk factors and indicators of school dropout. Children raised in poverty are less likely to enter school prepared to learn, are more likely to demonstrate low achievement, are more likely to have unmet basic needs such as health care, nutrition and housing and are more likely to drop out.

- **Student-Related Issues** - Emotional issues, particularly poor self-esteem and a lack of self-confidence, contribute to school-related behavior problems, poor academic performance, and a sense of failure - all of which can lead to drop out.
- **Substance Abuse** is a major problem among adults and youth in Sarasota County. Substance abuse among youth contributes to school-related behavioral issues that can lead to student dropout, yet there are few substance abuse treatment options for youth.
- **Truancy** is highly correlated with school dropout yet parents, schools, law enforcement and the community as a whole have little control over student attendance. A lack of enforcement and weak sanctions contribute to the problem.
- **Language Barriers and Immigration Status** - Students and families with limited English proficiency (LEP) find it difficult to access community services, and understand and navigate the public school system. There is currently a shortage of bi-lingual assistance available to support these students and their families. This is particularly true for Hispanics who represent 70% of LEP students. Furthermore, immigration laws create disincentives for high school completion.
- **Student Mobility** - The state of Florida and Sarasota County have a transient population and students who change schools multiple times are more likely to drop out of school.
- **Employment** – Despite Florida's labor laws, there are high school students who work more than 30 hours a week and late into the evening when school is in session. There is evidence that as the number of hours a student works increases, they tend to not do as well in school and are more likely to dropout.

3. Data limitations make it difficult to evaluate the causes of school dropout and measure the effectiveness of current efforts to address the problem.

- While data indicates that the majority of dropout occurs in 9th and 10th grade, this may reflect the fact that this is when students typically reach the age of 16 and can legally drop out. Tracking of dropouts begins in the ninth grade. The problems leading to school drop out begin much earlier and it is not clear how many students disengage or stop coming to school before reaching high school.
- While it is clear that low socio-economic status, black, and Hispanic students are disproportionately represented among dropouts, many dropouts come from groups not typically thought of as at-risk. Data limitations prevent a detailed analysis of the characteristics and the combinations of factors among various groups of dropouts. As a result, it is difficult to develop targeted approaches to the dropout problem.
- It is not clear how many students complete their high school education. As a result of Florida's method for calculating dropout and graduation rates and the impact of high rates of retention among 9th and 10th graders, graduation and dropout data cannot be reconciled. Furthermore, states vary in how they count dropouts and graduates making state and national comparisons difficult. The resulting "unaccounted for" students contributes to a lack of confidence among the public that the extent of the dropout problem is accurately measured.
- Evaluation of dropout prevention programs is inadequate and there is insufficient data to determine what resources (time and money) are dedicated to the dropout problem, and the effectiveness of current efforts or how they compare with other programs.

4. There are children who enter school without the basic skills to learn.

- Early interventions are important and effective for preventing dropout, particularly those that involve

families in providing an educationally-enriched home environment.

- Quality preschools and daycare facilities that prepare children for school have proven to be effective for improving children's academic achievement and high school completion rates. This is particularly true among children from disadvantaged families and/or whose home environment lacks educational enrichment.

5. Many students are not adequately prepared in basic literacy (reading and writing) and simple math beginning in early K-12 grades.

- There are a significant number of Sarasota County public school students who demonstrate an unacceptable level of reading beginning in early grades and persisting through high school. Of 2000-01 dropouts, 80% read below an acceptable level. There are not enough opportunities for academic remediation to bring these students to grade level, particularly after school and during the summer.
- Data indicates that many children who are behind academically continue to be promoted to the next grade level without adequate remediation and are entering high school without the academic skills needed to succeed. This is evidenced by the disproportionate rate of retentions among 9th and 10th graders when compared with lower grade levels.
- Florida's curriculum standards, increased graduation requirements, "high stakes testing," and school accountability program are intended to improve the academic performance of students and schools. The strong correlation between academic failure and dropout indicates that recently implemented changes may have unintended consequences. A result of failure to pass the FCAT test after repeated attempts, and the inability to graduate may contribute to an increase in student dropout.

6. Personal attention by caring adults is often lacking for at-risk students at all levels of education.

- Parental involvement in children's education is a significant factor influencing school dropout and it is important that parents be involved early on and at every level of education. While there are opportunities for parents to become involved in Sarasota County Public Schools, there are not enough formal programs that engage parents of at-risk students in their children's learning, and those programs that are available are not widely publicized or widely utilized by schools or families and are not easily accessible by some parents.
- Many at-risk students lack the support of a caring, supportive, role model to encourage them to achieve academic, personal, and career goals. In Sarasota, there are many caring people who want to do something about the school dropout problem, yet there is a shortage of community members serving as mentors for youth. Furthermore, the extent of the need for mentors for students is not clearly communicated to the community.
- One-on-one attention through efforts like smaller class sizes, tutoring, and mentoring have been demonstrated as effective for remediation of students with low academic achievement levels and to help encourage at-risk students to complete their education.
- The ratio of students to guidance counselors in the Sarasota County School District exceeds both the state and national averages, which makes it difficult to provide adequate counseling in social-emotional issues, academic advising and career guidance services to students.

7. Schools have not adapted to the needs of today's youth.

- There are few opportunities for youth to be involved in community decisions that affect them and input from at-risk youth is not typically solicited.
- School start times that are out of sync with adolescent sleep patterns and lack of flexibility in school schedules have been shown to contribute to school dropout.

- Individualized instruction recognizing that students have different learning styles and personal attention that acknowledges "the whole student" are key components of successful drop out prevention efforts.

8. School dropout affects the quality of Sarasota County's workforce and the economic development efforts of the community.

- Students who do not complete high school lack employability skills and basic academic skills, which impacts the quality of the workforce. The availability of educated, skilled employees is a significant factor in businesses' decisions to expand or relocate to an area and is important to economic development efforts in Sarasota County.
- Local businesses provide support to schools in many ways, including sponsorship of athletic activities and school functions and funds to purchase school supplies. More direct involvement by businesses would increase the effectiveness of career exploration, mentoring, and job shadowing programs.

9. The ability for students to relate what they learn to their vocational and/or postsecondary education goals impacts their decision to complete high school and the earlier these connections are made the more likely students are to see value in completing their education.

- The Florida Department of Education tends to focus on college bound students. However, not every student will choose to attend college as part of their postsecondary education plans. The current educational standards and curriculum in Florida focus on preparation for college and do not provide many options for students whose postsecondary plans do not include college. As a result, non-college bound students may feel that high school lacks relevance and may choose to drop out.
- For those students who enter high school substantially behind grade level, there are few alternatives to dropping out that allow them to complete high school. Furthermore, these students

cannot access SCTI's vocational-technical programs. If these courses were aligned with the student's interests and they were allowed to take them, they could provide the motivation to achieve at grade level and stay in school.

- The current all day technical high school and half day technical program offered through SCTI does not fully support non-college bound high school students because:
 - o There is not a strong enough connection with the high schools to ensure that these programs are made available as an option to all students who can benefit from them.
 - o SCTI's adult vocational training programs are not specifically designed for high school students and do not provide the infrastructure of a regular high school.
 - o There are misperceptions that SCTI is for students who cannot qualify for college – in fact students are required to achieve the same academic standards as those in traditional high school.
 - o There are barriers to accessing the program such as transportation, location, and program entrance requirements, which conform to reading and math levels, set by the FDOE for adults. Students must be on or close to grade level in reading and math to access the programs.

10. Current programs, services, and resources for at-risk youth are not fully utilized, in part due to a lack of coordination and collaboration.

- There are many good organizations in Sarasota County that serve youth who are at-risk of not completing school, but the community is not aware of the programs that are available and there is not a centralized resource for locating services for someone at risk of dropping out.
- There is not enough coordination and collaboration between schools, agencies, programs, and funding sources. As a result:

- o Student's psychological and social needs are not being met in concert with schools
 - o Services are not coordinated and funding and other resources are not used as efficiently as they could be
 - o There are effective programs that are not sustained when grant funding expires
- There is a disconnect between school administration and the individual schools and a lack of central focus and coordination of the school dropout problem. While research indicates that the Smaller Learning Communities high school reform effort should be a positive step toward helping those at risk of drop out, there is not a district-wide strategy that addresses all levels of education.
 - There is no "central clearinghouse" within the school district to guide school staff in accessing available services for potential dropouts.

11. Effective, positive transitions from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school are critical to students' academic achievement and to their decision to stay in school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are the Study Group's specific suggestions for change, based on the findings and conclusions. These recommendations are not presented in any specific order.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Actions the Study Group believes have the highest long-term potential to impact school drop out.

1. Prepare Children To Succeed in School

Early interventions that provide children with basic skills and literacy as early in life as possible are an integral component of effective dropout prevention. The School Readiness Coalition of Sarasota County and the United Way of Sarasota, Success By Six should convene community stakeholders, including public and private funders, for the purpose of developing and carrying out a community-wide strategy that addresses:

- Pre-natal programs and the opportunity for every Sarasota County four-year old to attend a high quality, accessible, and affordable pre-school and/or childcare program
- A funding strategy for sustaining prenatal and quality pre-school and childcare programs that will reduce or eliminate the long waiting lists that currently exist and ensure these programs are affordable by low-income families
- Methods for helping parents of at-risk children to create an educationally-enriched home environment
- The barriers to providing quality pre-school and childcare programs, including improving the accreditation process and increasing the supply of trained and certified staff
- The need for increased public awareness about the relationship between early childhood interventions and school dropout and the potential social and economic costs to the community of failing to prepare children for school

2. Provide Opportunities for All Parents To Be Involved in Their Children's Education

To involve parents in their children's education, especially those who have not been typically engaged, representatives of the Family Counseling Center's Families and Schools Together program, Parent Teacher Organizations, and the School Board of Sarasota County should convene a planning committee to develop a community-wide strategy that specifically addresses:

- Ways to involve parents who are not currently being engaged, such as working parents, parents of at-risk children, families from cultures not familiar with the public education system, and those with limited English proficiency
- Targeted approaches for middle and high school parental involvement
- Mechanisms for encouraging family and educational values, a home environment that supports learning, and involvement in children's learning activities at home
- Ways to strengthen and utilize the existing parent and community involvement structure within schools to execute the strategy
- An educational campaign to increase awareness among parents about the indicators of school dropout, guidelines for prevention, and the impact of mobility on student performance
- Guidelines for tailoring the strategy to the needs of individual schools

3. Ensure Basic Academic Skills

To ensure every student's ability to achieve grade level in reading, writing and basic math at all levels of K-12 education, the following actions should be taken:

3.1. The Study Group supports the current strategies the School Board of Sarasota County has in place to identify students who are below grade level and to emphasize intensive interventions at early grades. In addition, the School Board should:

- Continue researching, networking with other districts, and teacher training to find and implement effective strategies to remediate students at all grade levels who fall below an acceptable level (Level two or lower on the FCAT)
- Ensure that there is an early detection system to identify, remediate and monitor students who are not performing at an acceptable level
- Strengthen the current Academic Improvement Plan (AIP) process so that:
 - o Each identified student receives an individualized plan with stated goals for improvement that brings them up to grade level
 - o Efforts such as enrollment in educational after-school programs, summer school and mentoring/tutoring that can supplement the K-12 efforts are included in the AIP
 - o Each student with an AIP is assigned a central advocate (for example, a teacher or guidance counselor). This advocate should be responsible for monitoring and adjusting the plan and for ensuring that each service identified in the plan is delivered
 - o Each party to the AIP has stated goals and is accountable for results

3.2. The State Legislature, Florida Department of Education and the School Board of Sarasota County School District should re-evaluate the allocation of funding for remediation to ensure that adequate resources are committed to bringing K-12 students to grade level with specific consideration given to:

- The proportion of students at each school that are performing below grade level in addition to the proportion of students receiving free and reduced lunch

- Continue and expand remediation programs now available to include summer, after school, in the evenings, and on Saturdays

4. Provide Mentors, Tutors and Enhanced Guidance Services

Individualized attention and positive role models are important for children and youth. Volunteer tutors and mentors are a major potential resource for remedial work and can provide the caring, nurturing, and support to help at-risk children overcome personal, social, and academic problems. A concerted effort should be made to maximize community involvement and support for at-risk students.

4.1. The Sarasota County Board of County Commissioners' Mentoring Roundtable should partner with the Juvenile Justice Council to form a task force consisting of service providers, school district representatives, funders, businesses, and concerned citizens to develop a strategy for engaging the community in mentoring and tutoring programs. The strategy should give consideration to:

- Developing guidelines and materials that can be used by individual schools to create mentoring and tutoring programs targeted to the needs of their student population and the community they serve
- Identifying and addressing specific barriers to engaging mentors and tutors including liability concerns and misperceptions about time commitments
- Maximizing the use of successful mentoring programs that already exist in the community to support the needs of students and schools
- A public awareness/recruitment campaign to attract a diversity of mentors and tutors, including various age groups and racial and ethnic backgrounds. Special efforts should be made to engage other students as well as retirees and seniors
- Initially, placing emphasis on high school and middle school students, with a longer-range goal of elementary students
- A funding strategy that will sustain mentoring and tutoring programs in schools

4.2. To ensure that all middle school and high school students have established postsecondary goals and receive adequate guidance in accomplishing those goals, the School Board of Sarasota County should develop a district- wide plan that accomplishes the following:

- Establish a process whereby each student in middle and high school develops with a counselor an individualized career path plan and receives annual review of the plan
- Ensure that student to counselor ratios support the delivery of the above services to all students, including those with limited English proficiency
- Refocus the responsibilities of guidance counselors so that the majority of their time is spent providing one-on-one support, counseling and advising to students.
- Provide the necessary training to ensure that guidance counselors are able to assist both college-bound and non-college bound students

5. Increase Academic Relevance

Students should be given educational experiences that support their interests and goals and that help them connect what they learn to life outside of school. In addition to current efforts, the following actions should be taken:

5.1. The School Board of Sarasota County should continue to provide middle and high school classroom teachers the professional development and evaluation needed to prepare and encourage them to incorporate the following concepts into the instructional environment:

- Creative ways to make material relevant for students
- Opportunities to identify students' interests and provide educational experiences that explore and nurture those interests
- Opportunities for students to begin to explore vocational interests and form postsecondary goals
- Incorporate multiple learning styles in their instructional techniques

5.2. The Study Group supports the efforts by the school district to evaluate alternatives for providing vocational-technical programs to high school students. The Study Group recommends that these programs be easily accessible and available to all high school students and should:

- Result in a standard high school diploma
- Allow opportunities for experiential learning and applied academics
- Require the same standards of academic achievement as other programs

5.3. The Committee for Economic Development and the Suncoast Workforce Board should develop and execute a plan for linking local businesses with schools to provide opportunities for vocational exploration such as job shadowing, internships and other similar programs.

6. Provide Alternative Education for High School Students At-Risk

Every student at risk of dropping out of school should have access to an alternative education program. In support of the 1994 Sarasota County School Board recommendation that all district high schools offer a viable alternative education program, the school district should ensure that each district high school establishes such a program by the 2004 school year. The programs should be modeled after successful programs and should:

- Use non-traditional teaching methods (hands-on) and highly motivated teachers, to deliver instruction consistent with high performance learning models for at-risk students
- Provide access to support services and intensive academic remediation
- Consider as models the on-campus New View and New Deal programs

7. Coordinate and Evaluate Dropout Prevention

To ensure that there is a coordinated, collaborative approach to school dropout, the School Board of Sarasota County should appoint a district administrator who will work in

partnership with schools and community organizations that collaborate with schools to:

- Develop and execute a district-wide strategy to address school dropout at all levels of the K-12 system
- Assist schools in using the strategy as a guide for school-based approaches that meet the needs of the community and student population each school serves
- Establish measurable goals, track results against those goals, and evaluate the effectiveness of specific programs that are intended to improve the level of academic success of Sarasota County students
- Provide a formal, ongoing mechanism for sharing information about successful programs among community organizations and schools and encourage their use and sustainability district-wide
- Create a central resource that can provide assistance for teachers, counselors, parents and students to receive referrals to school and community-based services to aid students at risk of dropping out
- Develop a mechanism for sharing information across organizations so that the delivery of services to at-risk youth is coordinated, duplication is avoided, and multiple needs are met

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

~~Actions that address dropout-related problems and/or~~
support the advancement of the key recommendations

8. Communicate Dropout and Graduation Rates

In order to address the problem of school dropout, the community needs to clearly understand the extent to which Sarasota County youth complete high school. The Florida Department of Education should make the necessary changes in tracking and reporting systems so that the graduation and dropout rates and the “gap” between them are more understandable by the public. This effort should include:

- How many students graduate from the K-12 system, including those who take more than four years to complete
- How many students withdraw from school each year and why. Distinguish between those who drop out, whose whereabouts are unknown, who leave to enroll in an adult education program, and those who transfer from the district

The Florida Department of Education should develop a communication piece to be used by each school district to provide the public with a clear understanding of the extent to which youth complete or do not complete their high school education.

9. Increase Community Awareness and Educate the Public

To raise awareness that school dropout is an important community problem and to advocate for dropout prevention as a community priority, there should be a strong and sustained public education effort. Citizens for Better Schools should conduct a campaign that accomplishes the following goals:

- Educating the community about school dropout and its effect on the whole community
- Establishing dropout prevention as a community priority in Sarasota County
- Engaging the community as partners with schools to address dropout by serving as mentors and tutors
- Creating awareness of the underlying factors that contribute to the decision to drop out and provide information about where to get help for youth at-risk
- Increase community awareness of the importance of early interventions, such as quality pre-school and childcare as an integral component of effective dropout prevention

10. Identify At-Risk Students

To help facilitate the identification of students who may potentially drop out and to provide interventions that address the needs of those students most at risk, the Sarasota County School District should consider the following actions:

- The Study Group supports current efforts by the district to conduct a longitudinal analysis of the school dropout population and recommends that the school district conduct an analysis of the combinations of academic and socio-demographic (for example, student age, family status, parent education level, family income, etc.) characteristics of dropouts.
- Provide every teacher and guidance counselor with in-service training on dropout indicators, identification of at-risk students and how to assist students and their families in locating programs and services offered by the schools and community organizations
- Require an exit interview in order for a student to withdraw from school. The purpose of the interview should be to encourage the student to either stay enrolled or re-enroll; transfer to an appropriate adult education or alternative education program; inform the student of the consequences of dropping out of school, and to assist parents in obtaining needed services for their children.

11. Improve At-Risk Student Attendance

In order to improve student attendance and strengthen truancy enforcement, community-wide, the following actions should be taken:

11.1. The Sarasota County School District should ensure that district attendance policies are administered consistently by all schools and at all levels of education, and that truancy intervention programs are in place at each school. To facilitate this:

- Each school should have an effective and accurate system for tracking and monitoring attendance.
- Each school principal should have the necessary support staff and/or volunteers to ensure immediate contact with parents and timely counseling and follow-up for students and families. Attendance

staff should have the ability to communicate with parents with limited English proficiency.

11.2. The Sheriff's Department, each municipality's police department and the State Attorney's Office should work in partnership with the school district and Children in Need of Services/Families in Need of Services (CINS/FINS) representatives to make the necessary adjustments to ensure consistent, effective, and timely truancy enforcement. Consideration should be given to the use of truancy officers and a truancy court.

12. Modify the Learning Environment

Certain aspects of the learning environment cause students to feel disconnected from school and can contribute to the decision to leave school. The Study Group supports the current efforts of the Sarasota County School District to change the learning environment through the Smaller Learning Communities project. The Study Group asks the School Board of Sarasota County to also formally consider the following changes:

- Re-examine adjusting school hours to better correspond to adolescent biology
- Extend transition programs to all 8th grade students as well as students transitioning from grade school to middle school

13. Review the Impact of Florida's System of School Improvement and Accountability

In order to ensure that the positive program goals of improving both student and school performance are achieved, the legislative delegates representing Sarasota County should lobby the Florida Legislature to take the necessary steps to:

- Ensure that each school district receives adequate resources to support the efforts needed to provide every student the opportunity to achieve the mandated educational standards
- Review the penalties associated with school grading for unintended impacts on low performing schools and make the necessary adjustment
- Review the unintended, negative consequences of the FCAT as the basis for promotion and graduation (i.e. high stakes testing) and make the appropriate adjustments

14. Expand Health Screenings for At-Risk Children and Youth

Unmet basic health needs of students can interfere with learning. The Health Department, the Department of Children and Families, and the School Board of Sarasota County should collaborate to ensure that free or reduced health screenings (i.e. physical exams, vision screenings, dental and hearing exams) are available to students at all grade levels who are at or below poverty level and/or meet certain criteria for “at-risk.” Students should receive these screenings when they enter the district for the first time and when they exhibit significant, unexplained changes in their academic performance. Follow-up services should be provided for those with identified health problems.

15. Expand Substance Abuse Treatment Options

To ensure adequate treatment options for youth with substance abuse problems, Coastal Behavioral Healthcare Systems, First Step of Sarasota, Inc., and the Sarasota Coalition on Substance Abuse (SCOSA) should collaborate to ensure that there is a coordinated continuum of care for youth with substance abuse problems. Available services should include assessment and referral, outpatient and inpatient care, transitional services and ongoing support groups.

16. Protect Working Students

In order to ensure compliance with existing child labor laws and to minimize the potential negative effects that working too many hours can have on student performance, the following actions are recommended:

- The Business Licensing Division of the Sarasota County Government should conduct a business education campaign about child labor laws and the penalties for lack of compliance. Steps should be taken to identify employers who are non-compliant and to strengthen enforcement of penalties.
- The Department of Labor should collaborate with schools to educate students and parents about child labor laws and employee rights and about the potential impact of work on school performance.

- The Suncoast Workforce Board, and the Committee for Economic Development should work with schools to develop a campaign that encourages businesses to create incentives for employees to improve attendance, perform well in school, and graduate from high school.

17. Provide a Full-Service Site for Teens

The study group supports the intent of initiatives like Community Youth Development and asks that this coalition study and recommend an approach to providing teens with one or more “full service” sites in Sarasota County. These sites should offer a broad range of activities and services for youth with emphasis on exploration of their individual interests and talents. Teens should have the opportunity to assist in running the facility, under the guidance of supportive adults. A goal of the program should be to provide an environment in which teens feel a part of the community and are accepted, acknowledged and supported.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - DROPOUT AND GRADUATION RATES

Options for Completing High School

Students can complete their high school education through the K-12 public school system or through the Adult and Community Education division of public education.

K-12 – Students can receive a standard diploma, which includes a State of Florida High School Diploma (GED), a special diploma, or a certificate of completion by completing the graduation requirements of the K-12 system:

- **Standard Diploma** – Diploma awarded to students who have passed both sections of the High School Competency Test (HSCT) or the FCAT, successfully completed the minimum number of academic credits (24 for a traditional high school, 28 for a Block scheduled school), achieve a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale and meet other course requirements as specified in the graduation requirements.

Special Diploma – Two options are provided for earning a special diploma. Option one is based upon mastering state standards and earning the required credits. Option II is based on demonstrating competency through employment. A student who has been properly classified, in accordance with rules established by the State Board, as educable mentally handicapped, hearing impaired, specific learning disabled, trainable mentally handicapped, emotionally handicapped, physically impaired, profoundly handicapped, or language impaired is eligible to receive a special diploma.

High School Certificate of Completion - is awarded to students who attended high school, but did not meet all the requirements for a diploma. These are generally students who have completed all their course work with a 2.0 GPA but have not passed one or both portions of the FCAT.

GED Exit Option - A student can only earn a GED while enrolled in the K-12 system through the GED exit option. The Tests of General Educational Development (GED Tests) are developed by the American Council on Education to

enable individuals who have not graduated from high school to demonstrate the attainment of developed abilities normally acquired through completion of a high school program of study. GED Exit Option is a program designed to serve dropout prevention students as well as other students at risk of not graduating with their cohort group. These students must be at or above age for grade, have credit deficiency, or a low GPA and are otherwise capable of completing graduation requirements. Students utilizing the GED Exit Option Model must take and pass the HSCT or FCAT, as well as passing the GED Test. They will be awarded a standard high school diploma in addition to the State of Florida High School Diploma.

Sarasota County schools approved for implementing GED Exit Option Programs for 2002-2003 are the Adult and Community Education Center, Cyesis, Triad North and Triad South. Most students who exercise this option do not graduate in four years and are not counted in the graduation rate. In the past three years, less than 20 students completed high school using this option. According to ACEC, the American Council on Education approved a waiver for the Florida Department of Education to expand the criteria for eligibility for the GED exit option effective for the school year 2002-2003. It is anticipated that as a result, the number of students utilizing this means of high school completion will increase. Table A-1 shows the number of high school diplomas issued through the K-12 system for 2000-2001.

**Table A-1. 2000-2001 K-12 High School Diplomas
Certificates of Completion - Sarasota**

Standard Diploma	Special Diploma	Certificates of Completion
1,731	95	53

Source: Florida Department of Education

*Includes GEDs issued through the K-12 System

The Adult and Community Education Center (ACEC) - The Adult and Community Education Center offers free programs to students wishing to complete their high school education. Classes are offered day and evening and are located throughout the community. All classes are free of charge and open to any student age 16 or over who is not

enrolled in a K-12 program. ACEC offers three graduation options:

General Educational Development Program - Students can earn a State of Florida High School Diploma by passing the GED Test.

Adult High School - Adult students may enroll in the Adult High School and earn a Sarasota Adult High School Diploma by passing the required state assessment test and earning the number of credits necessary for graduation.

Co-enrollment in Adult High School - High school students may co-enroll in the Adult High School to take courses necessary to meet their high school graduation requirements. The number (and corresponding percent) of co-enrolled students who graduated from local district high schools in 2002 was:

Riverview	118 (23%)
Venice	121 (21%)
Sarasota	129 (29%)
Booker	66 (22%)
Pine View	7 (6%)
Cyysis	7 (30%)

Graduation Rate

In Florida, a high school graduate is a student who receives a standard diploma, special diploma, or GED diploma. The graduation rate is the number of students who graduate within four years of enrolling in grade 9. The initial 9th grade enrollment group is adjusted for new enrollees and certain withdrawals. Students who have been retained and do not graduate in four years are included in the cohort group, but are not counted as graduates when calculating the graduation rate. Students who receive a certificate of completion are not included in the graduation rate. Beginning in 1998, the method for calculating the graduation rate was revised to individuals beginning with first time enrollment in 9th grade. Table A-2 shows that the percentage of freshman that graduated in four years.

Table A-2. Graduation Rates and Diplomas K-12 System Sarasota County					
Year	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02
Graduation Rate	71.9%	63.4%	63.4%	70.3%	71.8%
Source: Florida Department of Education					

Method of Calculation – The initial 9th grade enrollment group adjusted for new enrollees and certain withdrawals. As an example, Figure A-1 illustrates the calculation for the 2001 graduation rate

Dropout Rate

Table A-3. Dropout Rates Sarasota County Public Schools					
School Year	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02
Rate	4.2%	3.6%*	3.6%	3.1%	3.1%
Students	387	439	445	401	428
Source: Florida Department of Education website, Profiles of Florida Schools *The Florida Department of Education website reports 7.6% in error. It has been corrected locally and approved by the state.					

In Florida, the dropout rate includes all students who dropped out in grades 9-12, regardless of age. It represents the percentage of students in grade 9-12 (from the year's total enrollment) who have withdrawn from school and have been assigned a dropout withdrawal code. Prior to the 1998-1999 school year, it only included students age 16 or older. Table A-3 shows the number and percent of dropouts for the past five years.

Graph A-1 shows the comparison of Sarasota County and State dropout rates for the past 6 years and Graph A-2 the dropout rate by race and ethnicity in Sarasota County for the period 1996 – 2002.

Table A-4. Percent of Dropout Students by Dropout Withdrawal Code Sarasota County 2000-2001					
Non-Attendance	Whereabouts unknown	Over 16 - No plans to return	Other reason	Expelled	Enrolled/- Did Not Enter
40%	34%	15%	5%	3%	3%
Source: Florida Department of Education					

There are 14 dropout withdrawal codes. Table A-4 provides the most frequent dropout withdrawal reasons for the 2000-2001 school year dropout population.

Figure A-1
2001 High School Graduation Rate Calculation - Example

Students enrolling in 9th grade *for the first time* during the 1997-1998 school year

Plus New 10th grade students during 1998-1999
 Plus New 11th grade students during 1999-2000
 Plus New 12th grade students during 2000-2001
 Minus students who withdrew and enrolled in:
 - Another school (a public school outside of the district or any private school)
 - A home education program
 - An adult education program (adult high school/GED)

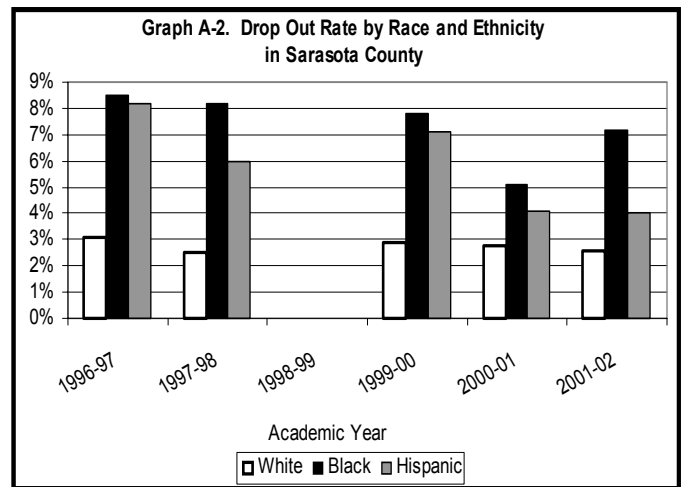
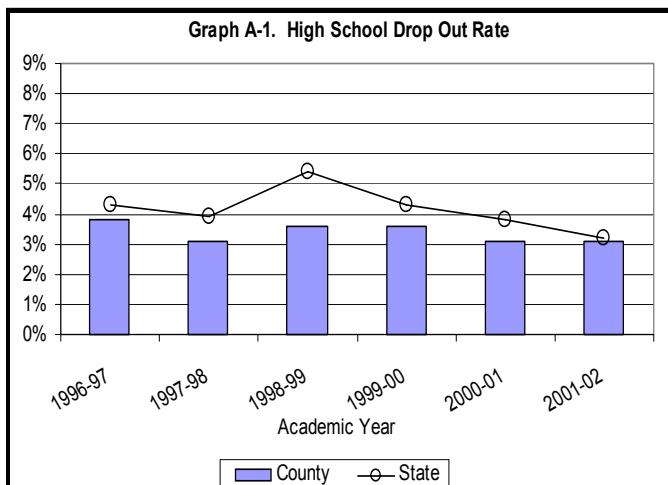
Equals The adjusted 9th grade group = 2,400

2001 Graduation Rate = 70.3%

The number of students in the adjusted 9th grade group who graduate = 1,688

The total adjusted 9th grade cohort group = 2,400

Sources: School Board of Sarasota County & Florida Department of Education



* The reported dropout rate for the 1998-99 school year was originally inaccurately calculated. The overall drop out rate was recalculated, the rates by race/ethnicity were not.

Figure A-2.

Graduation Rate	2001	70.3%
Dropout Rate	1998-2001	<u>14.5%</u>
	Total	84.8%

Source: School Board of Sarasota County

Reconciling the Numbers

As illustrated in Figure A-2, the graduation rate and the dropout rate don't add up to 100%. School Board

representatives indicate that a key factor may be how non-promoted students affect the calculation of the graduation rate. Non-promoted students who do not graduate in four years are not counted as graduates when calculating the graduation rate, but they are counted as part of their ninth grade cohort group, which is the denominator used to

calculate the graduation rate. Table A-5 shows the proportion of high school students retained for the 2000-2001 school year.

The Florida Department of Education also calculates a five-year graduation rate. Table A-6 shows the comparison of the four-year and five-year graduation rates for Sarasota County Public Schools.

Table A-5. Non-Promotion Rate Sarasota County 2000-2001			
Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
21.7%	22.4%	13.1%	2.8%
Source: School Board of Sarasota County			

Table A-6. Five-Year Graduation Rates as a Follow-up to 2000-2001 Four-Year Graduation Rates Sarasota County School District			
Year	Adj. Cohort	Graduates	Rate
2000-01 Four-Year Graduation Rate	2,400	1,688	70.3%
2001-02 Five-Year Graduation Rate	2,357	1,820	77.2%
Difference	43	132	6.9%
Source: Florida Department of Education			

APPENDIX B – MODEL PROGRAMS

NOTE: There are many programs and services available throughout Sarasota County that serve children and youth that are considered “at-risk.” It was not possible to provide information about each of these programs. However, the following programs were referenced by resource speakers as examples of programs that could positively impact school dropout if made more widely available in the Sarasota community. This is not intended as a complete list of exemplary programs serving children and youth in Sarasota County.

After School Programs		
Organization	Program Description	Locations
LAYR Group	21 st Century Learning Center - Programs funded by the U. S. Department of Education that provide children and youth with expanded learning opportunities in a safe, drug-free environment. Offers before and after-school programs, tutoring and workforce preparation. There are currently 90 elementary students, 350-400 middle school students, and 35-40 high school students participating at the three Booker schools and 30 students at each of the Gocio Elementary and Alta Vista satellites. The school district recently received funding to offer the program in North Port.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Booker Elementary, Middle and High Schools - Gocio Elementary School - North Port Schools (Planned)
Police Athletic League of Sarasota County, Inc. (PALS)	PALS - Provides a safe environment for kids to participate, learn and compete while developing positive relationships with law enforcement. Offers after school programs that include recreational activities, homework assistance and tutoring.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Newtown Estates Recreational Center - Venice High School - McIntosh Middle - Englewood Elementary School
Sarasota Family YMCA	After School Adventure Club - After school program for children in kindergarten through 5 th grade. Enrichment based with instructional classes in art, drama, foreign languages music, dance, homework assistance, computers and character development.	Elementary Schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ashton - Brentwood - Fruitville - Gulf Gate - Gocio - Oak Park - Phillipi Shores - Southside - Tuttle - Venice Middle
	Special Days - Available when public schools are closed for holidays and teacher in-services. Field trips and challenging indoor and outdoors activities for children ages 5 - 12.	

Mentoring Programs

Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Sun Coast	Bigs in Schools - provides youth mentoring for one hour per week during the academic year. At the time of this study, there were a total of 458 students participating in the Bigs program and 174 students waiting to be matched with mentors. Choices is a program in middle schools targeting positive decision-making. Students who participate are primarily from low socio-economic families and are having problems in school, most often with attendance and achievement.	There are 17 elementary schools, 5 middle schools, 5 high schools and 4 special schools that have students matched with mentors.
Take Stock in Children	A public-private partnership of state government, business, school systems, community organizations and private citizens. The program is offered in more than 50 counties in Florida, including Sarasota County. It serves low-income children and provides mentoring, tutoring and scholarships. Students who qualify for the program meet with mentors once a week and agree to remain drug and crime free and to maintain good grades. There are 112 students in the county participating in the programs. 55 are maintaining a 3.5 GPA or better; 9 are in their senior year, and 15 are in college.	Participating schools include: - Sarasota Middle School - North Port High School
Jewish Family and Children's Services of Sarasota-Manatee, Inc.	MARC - An in-school suspension program for middle school students that provides individual and small group counseling, tutorial work, and mentoring. Volunteers spend one hour a week at the schools working with students.	Participating schools include: - McIntosh Middle - Laurel Nokomis - North Port

Parental-Involvement Programs

Sarasota Family YMCA	Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) - A program for parents with pre-school children ages 3-5. The purpose of the program is to prepare children for success in school by improving reading skills. The program provides free reading materials and teaches the parent how to be the child's first teacher. Regular meetings are scheduled between the parent and the program staff for training, answering questions, and providing encouragement.	Offered at various facilities serving at-risk children. Provides weekly home visits to families and monthly meetings in Sarasota and DeSoto Counties.
Family Counseling Center	Families and Schools Together (FAST) - An early intervention and prevention program that provides family support services for children who are identified by their teachers as having behavior problems. Evidence shows that behavioral difficulties in young children (ages 4-9) are correlated with adolescent problems, including school failure, substance abuse, and teen pregnancy. The whole family participates in eight weeks of activities and receives two years of follow-up services. The program was provided in four schools during the 2002-2003 winter/spring periods and expects a total of 32-40 graduating families, or an estimated 120 individuals, during this period.	The FAST program was provided in four elementary schools during 2002-2003.
The School Board of Sarasota County, Adult and Community Education Center	Family Literacy Program - Parents receive parenting education and instruction to improve their own literacy (whether English is their primary or secondary language) and move toward self-sufficiency through GED preparation and workforce readiness. Children receive education focused on reading comprehension to prepare them for elementary school. There is structured time for families to read together.	Offered at various locations throughout the community.

Other Model Programs		
Sarasota County Education Assistance	The Mission of the Sarasota County Educational Assistance Program is to reduce juvenile crime, enhance education of children (grades 1-12), reduce dropout, and strengthen the family unit. This is accomplished through the provision of educational assistance, guidance, self-esteem programs, mentoring programs, and connecting students and families with necessary services. SCEAP provides tutoring and homework assistance, cultural activities to enrich learning, career exploration, computer literacy, access to computers for youth with no computers in their homes, scholarship assistance, and life skills.	2706 North Osprey Ave. Sarasota, FL
Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG)	Jobs for Florida's Graduates - A not-for-profit organization affiliated with JAG. JFG works in partnership with school administrators and in-school advisory committees to identify and work with youth at risk of dropping out of high school, or who have dropped out, and are at risk of being unemployed or underemployed after leaving school. JFG helps students overcome documented academic, personal or vocational challenges and acquire the skills necessary to secure a quality job or complete a postsecondary education or training program.	Schools offering the program include: - Booker High School - North Port High School
Community Youth Development Project	CYD is run by a group of teens and adults from the community who meet on a monthly basis to identify needs of youth in their area. With the help of staff from 12 not-for-profit agencies that serve youth and participate in CYD, programs are created that meet the needs of middle and high school aged teens.	CYD is organized into community groups that meet once a month in South Sarasota, North Port, Venice, Laurel, North Sarasota, and Englewood.

Resources for locating information about programs and services for at-risk youth:

- League of Women Voters of Sarasota County, Inc., *Programs for Youth At-Risk of Dropping Out of School*, (941) 921-9778.
- Sarasota Coalition on Substance Abuse (SCOSA), *Youth Activities in Sarasota County*, (941) 954-1573.
- United Way of Sarasota County, First Call for Help – Provides referral assistance as well as a directory of services, (941) 366-5025.

APPENDIX C

Note: This appendix provides a description of some of the major sources of funding for dropout prevention, remediation and programs for at-risk youth. It is not intended to be an exhaustive discussion of K-12 public school funding or funding for dropout prevention and at-risk youth programs.

Supplemental Academic Instruction Funds (SAI) are a component of the state and local Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) dollars received by each school district. SAI funds are to be used to help students gain at least a year of knowledge for each year in school.” Strategies may include modified curriculum, reading instruction, after-school instruction, tutoring, mentoring, class size reduction, extended school year, intensive skills development in summer school, and other methods of improving student achievement. SAI funds are used for K-12 students who fail to meet achievement levels required for promotion and to provide remedial strategies for students who scored level one on the FCAT.

In the Sarasota County School District, elementary and middle schools provide services for at-risk students, but do not designate the programs as dropout prevention programs. Generally, the high schools are continuing to support dropout prevention programs using their SAI funds. According to a district representative, SAI funds have been fairly flat and have not increased as the number of at-risk students has grown.

Each school determines how funds will be used and receives their allocation from the district based on the percent of students on free and reduced lunch (80%) and their student population (20%). In addition to districted schools, SAI funds must be used for charter schools (rated C or better) and Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) sites. Sarasota County received \$7,814,505 of SAI funds for the 2002-2003 school year.

SAI funds are primarily used for staff. The programs funded vary by school, but in general they are used by elementary schools for remediation, by middle schools for academic remediation and behavioral interventions, and by high schools for 9th grade transition teams and dropout prevention programs.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) - Title I, is the largest elementary and secondary education program and supplements state and local funding for low-achieving

children—especially in high-poverty schools. The program finances additional academic support and learning opportunities that are needed to help disadvantaged students progress along with their classmates. For the fiscal year 2000, Sarasota County School District received \$4,037,768 in Title I grants. A portion of these funds (1%) may be reserved for administration and 2% must be reserved for school improvements.

In 2001, the “No Child Left Behind Act,” which is a reauthorization of ESEA was passed. The four principles underlying the new law are stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents and students, and dependence on proven teaching methods. The law requires all states to develop “challenging state standards” that would be measured annually by state tests and measured against a national benchmark test. In exchange for stronger accountability standards, states and localities would be granted greater flexibility in spending of ESEA funds.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Section 10105 – Smaller Learning Communities – The primary purpose of these grants is to plan, implement, or expand smaller learning communities in large high schools of 1,000 students or more. A variety of strategies may be used to create a more personalized experience for students and improve student achievement and performance.

The Sarasota County School District received a planning grant followed by an implementation grant of \$1,381,007 to be used over a three-year period. The funds will be used primarily for professional development to support this initiative to provide for a more personalized education that integrates academic and career-related curricula (i.e., magnet programs, transition programs, career academies, community service/internship programs).

The Suncoast Workforce Board (SWB) receives federal and state funds through the Workforce Investment Act (WI) and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds that can be focused on targeted, at-risk youth populations. These funds are accompanied by regulations and eligibility criteria and have been reduced over the past few years. According to an SWB representative, the trend seems to be toward having to do more with less, with a high degree of accountability.

In 1998, the Job Training Partnership Act and its Summer Youth Program ended and the Workforce Investment Act Legislation (WIA) of 1998 was enacted. At that time, SWB

experienced approximately a 50% decrease in funds to be used for youth. Also during that time, SWB used available TANF funds to assist youth (Cyesis, Career Advisors). By the year 2000, SWB had a total of eight youth service contracts using both WIA and TANF funds. Over the last two years, the state has held back more and more TANF funds, which has forced SWB to end many youth contracts. This fiscal year alone, SWB is experiencing a TANF reduction of more than \$350,000. As such, SWB no longer financially supports Cyesis, TAPP, or the High School Career Advisors (the school district has picked up the funding so that this service continues to be available).

The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) oversees community-based delinquency early intervention and prevention programs that are funded through federal and state monies. The DJJ also contracts with local facilities to provide educational services to juvenile offenders and adjudicated youth. The DJJ funds currently support several second chance schools in Sarasota County as well as the Truancy Intervention Program.

GLOSSARY

ACEC – Adult and Community Education Center

ACT – American College Test - used for college admissions, similar to Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT)

AIP – Academic Improvement Plan - a plan designed by teachers on the academic team to meet the needs of students who scored at a low level on standardized tests in reading, writing or mathematics.

Alternative Schools – Schools that generally serve a special population, such as students with unique learning interests or disabilities, teenage parents, potential dropouts, violent individuals, or court-adjudicated youths and those in juvenile detention systems.

At-Risk - students who are considered to be at-risk of failure in their current educational setting; conditions/problems vary. For purposes of this report, the term “at-risk” refers to students who exhibit patterns of behavior and characteristics that are indicators and correlates of dropping out.

Certificate of Completion – Awarded to students who attended high school but did not meet all the requirements for a diploma. Generally, these students have completed all of their course work with a 2.0 GPA but have not passed one or both portions of the FCAT.

Charter Schools - Public schools that operate under a performance contract, or “charter,” which frees them from most of the rules and regulations created for traditional public schools. An individual, a group of parents or teachers, a business, a municipality, or a legal entity creates charter schools. As part of the contract, charter schools are held strictly accountable for academic and financial results.

CINS/FINS – Children in Need of Services/Families in Need of Services

Dropout (one-word) refers to a person or persons who has left high school prior to completion

Drop out refers to the action of leaving school prior to completion

DOP – Dropout Prevention – a program where remedial courses are taught to students who are at-risk of dropping out of school.

Dropout Rate – In the state of Florida, the percentage is calculated by dividing (a) the number of students in grade 9-12 for whom a dropout withdrawal reason was reported by (b) the year’s total enrollment for grades 9-12. District and state rates include students in alternative schools and exceptional educational schools.

ESE – Exceptional Student Education (Special and /or Gifted Education) - there are many exceptionalities and categories/ levels therein.

ESEA – Elementary and Secondary Education Act - now called “Improving America’s Schools Act.” A program directed at improving education for America’s poor and disadvantaged students.

ESL – English as a second language – native language is not English.

ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages. Categorizes students who are in their first or second year of learning the English language in the school setting.

FCAT – Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test - student assessment test used to measure student ability and growth in the academic subject areas. The current testing evaluates student knowledge and skills in Mathematics and Language Arts (English). FCAT tests for science and social studies are forthcoming.

FDOE – Florida Department of Education

FTE – Full-Time Equivalency Student – student enrollment

GED - General Educational Development exam or high school equivalency test (GED tests) are developed by the American Council on Education to enable individuals who have not graduated from high school to demonstrate the attainment of developed abilities normally acquired through completion of a high school program of study. Students who pass the GED assessment receive a State of Florida High School Diploma.

GPA – Grade Point Average

Graduation Rate – A high school graduation rate is often based solely on students receiving “regular” high school diplomas within four years of entering 9th grade. High school completion rates usually count both those students who receive regular diplomas and those who complete high school by means of an equivalency test, such as the GED.

Graduate - In Florida, a **graduate** is a student who receives a standard diploma, special diploma or GED diploma within four years of first time enrollment in grade 9. Florida uses a cohort method to calculate the graduation rate. The graduation rate is the number of students who graduate within four years of enrolling in grade 9. The initial 9th grade enrollment group is adjusted for new enrollees and certain withdrawals. Students who have been retained and do not graduate in four years are included in the cohort group, but are not counted as graduates when calculating the graduation rate.

Gifted – student is in the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program, but as “gifted,” having scored at the gifted level when tested for this program.

HSCT – A secondary level standardized test for students

LEP – Limited English Proficiency – Students whose first or native language is other than English.

Magnet School/Program – specialized school/program that focuses on a particular area of study.

Methods for Calculating Dropout and Graduation Rates:

- **Event method** - proportion of students in a given age range (15 – 24) who leave school each year without completing a high school program. Florida uses the event method to calculate the dropout rate.
- **Status method** – proportion of the population that has not completed high school and is not enrolled in school regardless of when they dropped out.
- **Cohort method** - measure what happens to a single group of students over a period of time.

NCES – National Center for Educational Statistics

NDPC/N – National Dropout Prevention Center/Network

PTSO – Parent Teacher Student Organization (known as PTA – Parent Teacher Association – in some geographic areas).

Retention - Retention or non-promotion is the practice of requiring a child to repeat a particular grade or requiring a child of appropriate chronological age to delay entry to the next grade. Non-promoted students who remain a grade behind their cohort group for the four years and are not counted in the graduate group.

SAC – School Advisory Council – a shared-decision-making group made up of school staff, community members, parents, business partners and students at a given school.

SAI – Supplemental Academic Instructional Funds

SAT – Scholastic Assessment Test – used for college admissions, similar to ACT test

SIP – School Improvement Plan – annual plan developed by the School Advisory Council (SAC) to set goals for school growth in all areas. This plan measures growth from the previous year, and establishes growth goals for the current and upcoming school year.

Sarasota County Public Schools includes the kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) system, Adult and Community Education and Sarasota County Technical Institute. The public school system includes school administration, faculty and staff.

SCTI – Sarasota County Technical Institute

Second Chance Schools: District programs provided through cooperative agreements between the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), private providers, state or local law enforcement agencies, or other agencies for students who are disruptive, violent, or have committed serious offenses.

SLC – Smaller Learning Communities

Special Diplomas - Diplomas are sometimes provided for students with learning disabilities or other special needs that allow them to graduate with a different set of requirements from those of the traditional curriculum.

Standard Diploma – Student has completed all required courses with at least 2.0 GPA and passed the 10th grade FCAT assessment in reading and mathematics.

SWB – Suncoast Workforce Board

TITLE I – (formerly Chapter 1) – part of the Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994. It benefits poor, disadvantaged, and at-risk students by providing funding for support services.

The School Board of Sarasota County consists of four elected members and is the governing body of the district. It is responsible for the control, operation, organization, management, and administration of public schools pursuant to the provisions and minimum standards proscribed by Florida Statutes and State Board of Education Rules. The School Board appoints the superintendent of schools.

The Sarasota County School District - The district school system is part of the state system of public education and includes all public schools, classes, and courses of instruction and all services and activities directly related to education in the District, which are under the District school officials’ direction (i.e. the Superintendent of Schools). In the state of Florida, each county is a school district.

Vocational Education – A component of education that deals with training students in a specific career area - usually hands-on training.

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