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Learning to Manage with Data in Duval County Public Schools: Lake Shore Middle School (B)

After Lake Shore Middle School's letter grade dropped from a C to a D, Principal Iranetta Wright and her staff were devastated. The disappointment, however, quickly turned into what Wright called "a new sense of urgency and strong level of excitement" to improve student achievement in SY05.¹ Wright, her leadership team, and teachers explored the available data in order to begin charting a course of action.

First, Wright, her vice principal, and the three grade-level administrators synthesized their findings from the quick peek and snapshot classroom observations conducted in SY04. They created a spreadsheet to map out teachers' instructional practices identified as weaknesses and found two major areas in which most Lake Shore teachers needed improvement: 1) implementation of reading strategies and standards, and 2) utilization of the activity-based workshop model the school had adopted in reading, writing, and math. Confirming their findings, the group discovered that students with the highest Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) gains were in classes with teachers who used the reading strategies and workshop models most effectively.

Next, Wright and her leadership team met separately with each department—during one full day each with the English/language arts (ELA) and math departments, and four half-days with the social studies and history departments—to diagnose the 2004 FCAT data, students' course grades, and school-climate issues with teachers. At the start of each meeting, Wright distributed Academic Interpretation and Data Evaluation (AIDE) reports and posed three questions:

1. Where are we now?
2. Where are we going?
3. How will we get there?

¹ SY is a PELP convention that denotes "school year." For example, SY05 refers to the 2004–2005 school year

Research Associate Caroline King prepared this case under the supervision of HBS Professor Allen Grossman and HGSE faculty member James P. Honan. It is meant to be used in conjunction with "Learning to Manage with Data in Duval County Public Schools: Lake Shore Middle School (A)," PELP-008. PELP cases are developed solely as the basis for class discussion. Cases are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data, or illustrations of effective or ineffective management.

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In reflecting back on the meetings, Wright observed, “It was really powerful for me to hear such similar answers across the four departments.” In looking at the executive summary math and reading reports, teachers identified that nearly 70% of Lake Shore students scored a Level 1 or 2 on the 2004 FCAT. After sharing the FCAT reading and math A+ content score reports with the departments, Wright noted, “For the first time, I felt like teachers finally bought in to the idea that our students are weak on every FCAT strand and that every teacher needs to take the responsibility to address the FCAT skills in their class. We cannot just work on the reading strands in ELA classes, but also in math, social studies, and history, and it’s the same for the math strands.”

The departments also analyzed the FCAT gain and loss reports. According to Wright, everyone was shocked by the large number of students who had dropped an FCAT level from SY03 to SY04—105 sixth graders, 66 seventh graders, and 84 eighth graders. Wright, who was intimately familiar with Florida’s school letter-grade system, observed, “If 63 more students had scored a Level 3, we would have maintained our C. That’s exactly a quarter of the students who lost a level this year. We have to find a better way to help our students maintain or improve a level next year.”

Wright asked the teachers to share their biggest challenges in SY04 and suggested solutions to improve student achievement in SY05. Teachers’ concerns included: professional development had not been differentiated to meet individual teachers’ needs, insufficient time for collaborative planning and analyzing student work, inconsistent expectations across grade levels, the lack of intentional community building among teachers, inadequate training on developing effective lesson plans and classroom behavior management, and school security. Teachers recommended some “absolutes” to support more effective teaching and learning: 10-minute independent reading blocks, weekly test-taking strategies, weekly planning meetings by grade level and subject, a “problem of the day” corresponding to a specific FCAT strand of the month, a “bank” to share effective lesson plans, more benchmark tests and nontraditional assessments such as portfolios, and stronger implementation of the workshop model.

Looking back on SY04, Wright and her leadership team had learned a lot about managing with data to improve student achievement. Now, their challenge was to translate their lessons learned into action steps for SY05. Fortunately, their efforts would be supported by a number of new Duval County Public School (DCPS) initiatives. Based on Wright and her staff’s analysis of the 2004 FCAT results and the school’s key challenges in SY04, Wright hoped to strengthen five major areas in SY05:

1. Professional development
2. Training and supporting new teachers
3. Curriculum, assessment, and alignment
4. Sharing best practices across schools and classrooms
5. Communicating performance to students, parents, and the public

Translating Learning to Action

Professional Development

Teachers Wright and her team designed a new two-week summer professional development program for returning teachers focused on effective lesson planning, FCAT strands, data analysis,

instructional strategies, reading techniques, and standards implementation. Thirty-six teachers, about one-third of the teaching corps, signed up to attend the voluntary and paid two-week session.

In SY05, the Lake Shore team planned to focus on the school's weakest FCAT strands and target professional development on one strand per month. Wright and her team hoped this format would enable the team to show teachers effective strategies for specific strands and student needs. In addition, Wright would ask each teacher to craft a year-long professional development plan to address ways to improve his or her instructional practice. Wright and her leadership team intended to use this information to design differentiated professional development sessions geared toward meeting teachers' specific needs. Wright also planned to give all teachers student profile reports for every student at the beginning of SY05 so that teachers would be familiar with a student's strengths and weaknesses in all subject areas as well as FCAT performance areas.

Administrators Wright also had plans to strengthen the skills of her leadership team members. She intended to dedicate a portion of weekly administrative team meetings to professional development in areas such as data analysis and instructional strategies.

Training and Supporting New Teachers

Wright and her leadership team designed a new teacher-induction program for SY05. One week before the first day of school, incoming Lake Shore teachers would receive training in data analysis, instructional strategies, the middle school curriculum, lesson planning, safety nets, and the school's policies and practices. Wright and her team planned to continue training with the new teachers once a week during the first nine-week quarter of SY05 and then once a month. New teachers would also be paired with a volunteer mentor teacher for the year.

Curriculum, Assessment, and Alignment

Curriculum Lake Shore planned to tweak the curriculum to better address student needs. Reflecting on SY04, one math teacher noted, "In our department meeting, we decided that we need to change the curriculum sequencing next year so that we can cover fractions much earlier in the year and give our students a lot of time to practice before the FCAT." Four ELA teachers volunteered to do an in-depth study of Lake Shore's curriculum for a week during the summer of 2004. Based on the students' weakest areas identified by the FCAT 2004 results, the team would look for potential gaps, misalignment, or flawed sequencing in the Lake Shore ELA curriculum. The math and social studies departments also designed new common assessments at the end of each unit. The curriculum review teams were also writing sample lesson plans that would be available to all teachers in the newly created "Lesson Plan Bank."

During SY05, the district planned to roll out a revised sixth- through 10th-grade curriculum that included new formative assessments by subject at the end of each unit.

Assessment During the summer of 2004, the Lake Shore leadership team planned to create quarterly reading and mathematics benchmark exams for SY05 to give teachers and administrators more frequent data on students' progress and individual needs. In SY05, DCPS would also administer districtwide reading and math benchmark tests in August and December.

Sharing Best Practices across Classrooms and Schools

Wright and her team had plans to help teachers and administrators share best practices. Literacy coach Katrina Short discussed her plan to strengthen coaching during the school year: "I have to be in classrooms more, not just observing, but modeling effective instructional strategies alongside teachers. We're also going to videotape teachers and use those to start concrete conversations about what good practice does and does not look like. And, instead of holding so many trainings on data use, I'm going to collect student work and analyze it with teachers." Wright also noted, "My leadership team and I are planning to visit other schools more often so we can learn how other schools assess their students' needs and try to address them, talk about what's working and what's not across our schools, and take ideas back to Lake Shore."

In SY05, Lake Shore would continue looping in the seventh and eighth grades and would pilot a sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade loop in one teaching team. In an attempt to ameliorate time constraints for school staff district-wide, the Duval County School Board approved a biweekly early dismissal for SY05. Wright planned to take advantage of the time to institute the weekly grade-level and subject-planning meetings suggested by the teachers.

Communicating Performance to Students, Parents, and the Public

Having received a D under Florida's accountability system, Lake Shore was now labeled a "challenged school." Wright hoped to communicate the school's performance more effectively to students, parents, and the public, remarking:

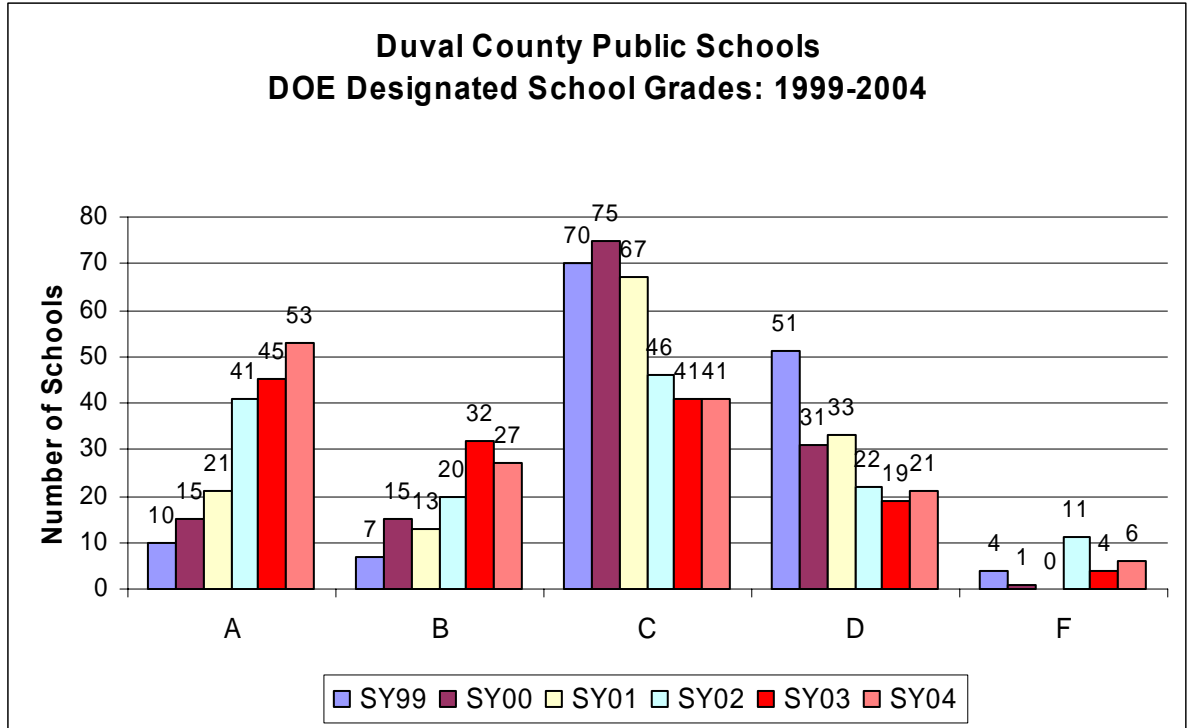
I often feel like we're fighting a problem of public perception that the neighborhood middle schools aren't good. Most of our elementary feeder schools are A schools, but it appears as if the higher-performing students either apply to the magnet middle schools or leave the county to attend private schools. Next year, we're going to hold more information nights for current and prospective parents, continue offering fifth-grade tours, and market our own gifted and talented and advanced program more aggressively.

Given that 13 of the district's 25 middle schools had dropped a letter grade in 2004, Wright certainly had company.

Districtwide, there was cause to celebrate and be concerned. Fifty-three schools—about a third of the district—earned As, an increase of eight over SY03. Yet, the number of B schools declined slightly, from 32 to 27, and the number of C schools stayed stagnant at 41. More disturbing, however, was the rising number of challenged schools—schools earning Ds and Fs—from 23 in SY03 to 27 in SY04 (see **Exhibit 1** for a history of DCPS school grades). Of the district's six F schools, two high schools had earned two or more Fs in four years, meaning that students would be eligible to transfer to a higher-performing school or receive a voucher to attend a private school. Superintendent John Fryer remained calm and committed: "We will be able to take on all these challenges, I think, and maintain the steady course we have had with some fine-tuning. There's no need for a panic button or revolutions. It's just stand behind our schools and our leaders."²

²Beth Kormanik, "Duval FCAT scores mixed as suburban grades soar," *The Florida Times-Union*, June 16, 2004.

Exhibit 1 History of DCPS School Grades, SY99-SY04



	SY99	SY00	SY01	SY02	SY03	SY04
A	10	15	21	41	45	53
B	7	15	13	20	32	27
C	70	75	67	46	41	41
D	51	31	33	22	19	21
F	4	1	0	11	4	6

Source: District files.

Note: Excludes charter schools.