

addresses vocational education concerns. Projects include the Florida Information Resources Network (FIRN), Regional Centers of Excellence, Out-of-School Learning, regional coordinating councils, revisions in the Florida Education Finance Program, automation for teacher certification, an Institute for Instructional Research and Practice and Student Evaluation and Performance, a Center for Interdisciplinary and Advanced Graduate Study (for research and development on instructional leadership), a vocational education management information system, and interagency coordination for middle childhood education. For the 1982-83 fiscal year, just under a half-million dollars was appropriated for this thrust area. For '83-84, there was almost \$4.8 million, for '84-85 \$11.4 million, and over \$9.9 million for '85-86.

### A Scenario for Progress

How does all this translate in terms of impact on major stakeholders in public education? What do current measures and indicators tell us about ongoing effects and future benefits to citizens of Florida? A closer look at what is happening in several programs shows how these thrusts have been interrelated to support progress at all levels ranging from individual student gains to steady, system-wide improvements.

In 1977, Florida became the first state to implement a statewide competency program (essentially an ACCOUNTABILITY thrust) when the State Board of Education adopted minimum student performance standards in reading, writing, and mathematics at grades 3, 5, 8 and 11. Student performance based upon these standards is measured annually through the statewide assessment program, and Florida statutes require that a composite be determined for the performance of a school or program. If the performance does not meet an established minimum requirement, the appropriate superintendent, principal, and school advisory committee are notified.

The composite score was established in 1977 and has been applied since then to performance on SSAT-I at grades 3, 5, 8, and 11. The composite performance for a school's reading, writing, or mathematics program is the average percentage of students achieving each standard within the program as measured through statewide assessment. A composite student performance of less than 70% results in identification of a program as deficient. This process involves an ACCOUNTABILITY strategy (the third thrust), and a SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT strategy (the fourth thrust), which triggers increased attention and resources directed to IMPROVING INSTRUCTION IN PRIORITY AREAS (the first thrust).

First-thrust programs such as statewide compensatory education and PREP have helped to drop the percentage of deficient programs statewide from 17.7% in 1977 to only .2% in 1983. In keeping with this success, the composite performance was raised to 80% in 1984, and the deficient programs only rose to 2.4% of those



assessed statewide. Thus it is clear that there has been substantial improvement in individual, school, and system performance.

Services aiming at early diagnosis and prevention of problems which directly or indirectly affect academic performance have heretofore been concentrated at the early grades; increased test scores and a 95% promotion rate for third graders have attested to the success of this preventive strategy. Recent legislation authorized and funded the Model School Adjustment programs, aimed at students in the middle grades, supporting university research into identifying at-risk students in grades 4-8, and school district research plus service through model prevention programs for students in these grades.

Legislation was passed in 1986 in an effort to stop the downward trend of Florida's graduation rate by providing a comprehensive approach to dropout prevention. First, this act focuses on dropout prevention by shifting the emphasis from current alternative education discipline-oriented programs to more creative and positive programs that will increase the student's chances of succeeding academically and provide educational experiences which are more relevant to certain students' needs and aspirations.

Five different dropout prevention programs are defined in the measure as are criteria for student eligibility. These are Educational Alternatives Programs; Teenage Parent Programs; Substance Abuse Programs; Disciplinary Programs; and Youth Services Programs.

Beginning with the 1987-88 school year, a school district must develop and submit a comprehensive dropout prevention program which meets certain criteria in order to be eligible to receive funding for any of the five types of dropout prevention programs. These programs must involve an emphasis on more parental, community and business involvement. Each district will designate one individual to be responsible for implementing and administering the dropout prevention program which will include early identification of potential dropouts, dropout retrieval activities and developing employability skills and other activities related to preparing for the work force.