

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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June 11, 2004

MEMORANDUM

TO: District School Superintendents

FROM: Jim Warford

SUBJECT: 2004 Legislation: Middle Grades Reform Act

Governor Bush has signed into law SB 354, Public School Educational Instruction, which includes the Middle Grades Reform Act (see copy attached; note that additional provisions of this legislation related to physical education will be addressed in a separate memorandum).

The Middle Grades Reform Act focuses on increasing the rigor of academics in grades 6, 7, and 8; using reading as the foundation to increasing student achievement in all subject areas; and driving the success of *Just Read, Florida!* into our middle schools. The intent of this legislation is that middle grade students receive rigorous academic instruction through challenging curricula, delivered by highly qualified teachers in schools with outstanding

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leadership, which are supported by engaged and informed parents. Key provisions which have immediate impact for school districts are as follows:

Rigorous Reading Requirement

By October 1, 2004, each public school with fewer than 75 percent of its students in grade 6, grade 7, or grade 8 reading at or above grade level (FCAT Level 3) must incorporate a Rigorous Reading Requirement as the primary component of its school improvement plan. The purpose of this requirement is to assist each student who is not reading at or above grade level to do so before entering high school.

The Rigorous Reading Requirement component must include

- specific areas that address phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary; and the desired levels of performance in these areas
- the instructional and support services to be provided to meet these, including research-based instructional practices shown to be successful in teaching reading to low-performing students.

Schools required to implement the rigorous reading requirement must provide quarterly reports to the district school superintendent on the progress of students toward increased reading achievement, and the results of such implementation shall be used as part of the annual evaluation of the schools' instructional personnel and school administrators in accordance with s. 1012.34, Florida Statutes.

Personalized Middle School Success Plan

Beginning with the 2004-2005 school year, each principal of a school with a middle grade shall designate certified staff members to develop and administer a personalized middle school success plan for each entering sixth grade student who scored below Level 3 in reading on the most recent administration of the FCAT. The purpose of the plan is to assist the student in meeting state and school district expectations in academic proficiency and to prepare the student for a rigorous high school curriculum.

The personalized success plan must

- identify educational goals and intermediate benchmarks in core curriculum areas which will prepare the student for high school
- be based upon academic performance data and identification of the student's strengths and weaknesses
- include academic intervention strategies with frequent progress monitoring
- provide innovative methods to promote the student's advancement (flexible scheduling, tutoring, focus on core curricula, online instruction, alternative learning environment, or other interventions shown to accelerate the learning process).

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Additionally, the personalized success plan

- must be incorporated into any individual student plan required by federal or state law (AIP, IEP, 504, or ESOL)
- must be developed in collaboration with the student and the student's parent(s)
- must be implemented until the student completes eighth grade, or achieves Level 3 on the FCAT (Reading)
- must minimize paperwork
- may be incorporated into a parent/teacher conference, included as part of a progress report or report card, included as part of a general orientation at the beginning of the school year, or provided by e-mail or other written correspondence.

Assistance to Districts and Schools

To assist districts in meeting the School Improvement Plan/Rigorous Reading Component and Personalized Middle School Success Plan requirements, the Department has included these required components in District and School Improvement web-based reporting tools (www.osi.fsu.edu) as follows:

- **District Improvement and Assistance and Intervention Plan Reporting Database**
This database includes a section requesting a description of the Rigorous Reading Requirement being implemented in your district. On the front page of this database there is a listing of the schools in your district that must implement the Rigorous Reading Requirement.
- **School Improvement Plan Reporting Database**
This database includes a section required for any school in your district serving students in grade 6, grade 7, or grade 8 where fewer than 75 percent of students are reading at or above grade level (FCAT Level 3) to report its Rigorous Reading Plan. Additionally, any school serving grade 6 students where fewer than 75 percent are reading at or above grade level must report its requirements for the Personalized Middle School Success Plan component.

We encourage you to begin to utilize these tools immediately; additional technical assistance related to these requirements will be made available in the near future.

The Department will also be working with the Florida Center for Reading Research, the Just Read, Florida! Office, and key education stakeholders, including district and school personnel, parents, and students, on additional reform requirements as follows:

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- **Comprehensive Reform Study on the Academic Performance of Students and Schools**

By December 1, 2004, the Commissioner shall submit to the State Board and legislative leaders recommendations to increase the academic performance of middle grade students and schools, based on a comprehensive study of academic expectations, attendance policies and student mobility issues, teacher quality, identification and availability of diagnostic testing, availability of personnel and scheduling issues, middle school leadership and performance, and parental and community involvement.

- **Review of Reading/Language Arts Curricula and Courses**

By March 1, 2005, the State Board of Education shall adopt rules to implement new or revised reading and language arts curricula in the middle grades based on research-based proven effective programs, with such courses to be phased in beginning with the 2005-2006 school year. Recommendations will be based on the Department's review of course offerings, teacher qualifications, instructional materials, and teaching practices in these middle grades content areas.

We look forward to working with you on the implementation of this important legislation, and appreciate your continued efforts to ensure that all Florida students are successful readers, and that our middle grade students will be prepared for success in high school.

JW/dnl

Attachment: CS/CS/SB 354 (Enrolled)

cc: Assistant Superintendents for Curriculum and Instruction
Directors of Middle School Education
Supervisors of Reading/Language Arts
Directors of Student Services
Middle School Principals
Middle School Guidance Supervisors