



URBAN SCHOOL BOARD EXCELLENCE

URBAN ADVOCATE: 2005 AWARD EDITION

2005 CUBE ANNUAL AWARD FOR URBAN SCHOOL BOARD EXCELLENCE

The School District of Hillsborough County, Fla., has been named the winner of the Council of Urban Boards of Education's second annual Award for Urban School Board Excellence.

Virginia's Norfolk Public Schools and Texas' San Antonio Independent School District were selected as finalists for the award, which will be presented at the CUBE Annual Conference in Las Vegas.

All three school boards, which govern majority-minority districts, are being recognized for their leadership and efforts to improve student achievement, narrow the achievement gap, and bring their diverse communities together. As the winner, Hillsborough County will receive a \$5,000 contribution to its student scholarship fund from sponsor McGraw-Hill Education, and all three districts will be recognized at the CUBE conference.

The judges said Hillsborough's application "stood out from the very beginning," citing the district's internal accountability system and the board's focus on collaborative governance. As examples, they noted that the district has master board training that includes the senior administrative staff, plus an urban education institute that informs teachers and staff on issues unique to urban schools.

"This board gets it," one judge said.

CUBE, the urban component of the National School Boards Association, works to promote best practices that showcase excellence in school board governance. Presented annually to a member district, the Award for Urban School Board Excellence is an example of CUBE fulfilling its mission to create opportunities for urban school board leaders to showcase their knowledge and skills as policymakers.

Applicants had to describe a vision for their governance role and show that the board implemented a strategy to narrow gaps in achievement between groups of students. Also, board members had to demonstrate leadership in creating a learning environment conducive to student achievement and show that they had successfully strengthened community support for the district.

Finalists were selected by a panel of distinguished judges based on materials submitted by the school districts and independent follow-up research. The judges were Ben Canada, Texas Association of School Boards; Arnold Fege, Public Education Network; Michael Usdan, Institute for Educational Leadership; and JoAnn Yee, California School Boards Association.

Among the finalists, the judges noted that San Antonio has a board and superintendent with a particularly strong working relationship. Both the superintendent and the board "understand the relationship between good governance, closing the achievement gap, advancing district-wide academic excellence, and strengthening the community," the judges stated.

Norfolk, the only district to be a finalist for consecutive years, was recognized for its focus on board professional development and self-evaluation as well as its community outreach efforts.



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HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

DOING WHAT'S FAIR DOESN'T MEAN DOING THE SAME FOR ALL

When seven star teachers and longtime friends opted to move this year to one of Hillsborough County's most challenged schools, Candy Olson knew the school board's initiative to pay more to urban educators was working.

"It's very hard to describe the spirit that's infused into a school when you get a bunch of seasoned teachers who are very excited about teaching," says Olson, the board chair.



Cork Elementary School students at their Hispanic Heritage Cultural Festival

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

Board members: Candy Olson, chair; Carolyn Bricklemeyer, Doretha W. Edgecomb, Jennifer Faliero, Carol W. Kurdell, Jack R. Lamb, Susan L. Valdes.

Governance structure: Five board members are elected by district; two are elected at-large. Board members serve four-year, staggered terms.

Superintendent: MaryEllen Elia
Number of students: 192,000
Number of schools: 220
Number of staff: 33,000
Percentage of students by race/ethnicity:
White: 44.58%
African American: 22.67%
Hispanic: 21.5%
Multiracial: 4.47%
Asian American: 2.5%
Indian: .32%
Percentage of students receiving free and/or reduced-price lunch: 45%
Percentage of students in special education: 7.5%
Percentage of students who are English language learners: 20%
Per-pupil expenditures: \$3,670.26 (weighted full-time equivalent)
Annual operating budget: \$2.1 billion
Website: www.sdhc.k12.fl.us

Thanks to a new salary differential program, veteran teachers who choose to work with high-poverty students earn a 10 percent boost in pay. New teachers who also meet federal standards for "highly qualified" educators receive a 5 percent bump. Teachers with National Board Certification get an additional \$8,500.

The willingness to change course when data shows traditional approaches aren't working is one of the things that makes the School District of Hillsborough County (SDHC) so effective, according to Olson.

"I think for years we've tried to do the same thing for every school on the theory that that's what's fair," she says. "We've learned that doing the same for every school is not what's fair. We have to do different things where there are different needs."

Shared decision-making engages community

A microcosm of public education across the nation, Hillsborough County is the ninth-largest school district in the United States. It encompasses Tampa, Fla., as well as suburban and rural areas.

The minority-majority district's 192,000 students speak more than 70 languages; about 45 percent live in poverty. The district's Hispanic and migrant student populations are growing rapidly.

Given that the district is the size of Rhode Island, parents could be excused for worrying that their children's needs might go unnoticed. Yet school board members and district staff are known for their close ties to the community.

"For being so large, it's amazing how many people know each other," says RoseAnn Bowers, a retired educator and member of the district's Citizen's Advisory Committee. "Board members are always very involved with the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce and important nonprofit boards in the community. District staff invite agencies to work with them, and they also meet regularly with Hillsborough County government employees on different matters."

Mike Griffin, a local business leader who also serves as the committee's chairman, agrees. "The district does a tremendous job of educating the community and engaging people in the decision-making process," he says.

The key, say Bowers and Griffin, is that the school board listens and responds to the input it seeks.

"There's just a mutual respect there for what the folks have to say," says Bowers. "Even if there's not an agreement or action isn't taken right away, an explanation is given."

Griffin calls the board's approach "shared governance with all of their constituencies."

"There is a working respect there that's very, very important and a huge positive for our district," he says.

Reaching out to parents

Hillsborough County also goes to unusual lengths to involve parents as partners in their children's learning. A Parent Resource Bus staffed with certified teachers visits neighborhoods, community centers, clinics, and homeless shelters to give parents tips on helping their children succeed in school.

Parents temporarily residing in homeless shelters receive transportation vouchers to help them attend their child's school events. Parent Resource Bus staffers also help parents and family members access community services and resources. This fall, the district hosted free parent "survival nights" packed with fun and free daycare for kids as well as information on district and community resources.

Through school board connections to health organizations, SDHC has found new ways to help families meet their children's health-care needs. Every school now has a nurse available to help with agency referrals and children's health issues, while a partnership with the county's health department is giving students and their parents important information regarding asthma, allergies, and obesity.

Last year, Hillsborough's schools reported more than 1.4 million volunteer hours and more than \$42 million in donated goods and services.

A partnership with Hewlett Packard is bridging the digital divide by using a percentage of return from all district and employee computer purchases to supply new computers for families who cannot afford in-home technology. So far, 357 families comprising of 1,071 children and 535 adults have benefited from the program, which also provides training at computer centers near recipients' homes.

The goal of these partnerships is simple, says Superintendent MaryEllen Elia: It is to provide the best education in the nation.

"Having people in the community be responsive to the needs of the students and the schools provides a great advantage for us," says Elia, a longtime district administrator who was named superintendent this summer following an extensive nationwide search. "Achievement and success for all students is what our goal and our vision is."

Success for all students

SDHC is a high-achieving school district where "success for all students" is more than just a slogan, it's a reality. Academic achievement is on the agenda at every school board meeting.

The relentless focus on student achievement and data-driven decision-making is paying off. Under Florida's state school grading system, the ethnically and culturally diverse school system ranks first in achievement for students with disabilities, with a 74 percent graduation rate.

Ranked as one of the "most outstanding school districts in the United States" by the 14th annual *Expansion Management* magazine report card, student achievement is high across the board. The district leads the state in the percentage of schools scoring an A, B, or C in the state's grading system, and SDHC students consistently outperform their Florida peers academically.

While other districts with large numbers of high-poverty students struggle to meet the new federal standards ushered in by No Child Left Behind, SDHC has already exceeded the 2007 Adequate Yearly Progress goals in middle school mathematics and other areas. The district's high school graduation rate is 79.3 percent, compared to a state average of 71.6 percent, while eighth-graders have scored first in the state comprehensive writing exam every year since 2000.

Equity in education goes beyond averages, though, and the Hillsborough school board is working diligently to close the gap in minority participation and success in Advanced Placement and honors courses. Honors enrollment in schools with greater than 40 percent of students receiving free and reduced-price meals increased 4 percent in just one year, while AP offerings in low-income schools increased 7 percent.

By 2004, the gap between the number of AP sections offered by low-income schools and more-affluent schools was reduced to 12 percent. AP course enrollment has increased 21 percent overall.

Intervention reduces the need for special education

Recognizing that the academic achievement gap takes root early in a child's life and school career, the district has expanded early childhood education and started an innovative program that pairs academic specialists with struggling readers in kindergarten through second grade

to provide additional tutoring and support.

"If we can identify students more accurately at an earlier age, we don't have to wait until they fail to intervene," says Michael Grego, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction.

The district initiated the program after data analysis showed disproportionate numbers of poor and minority students were being referred for special education services. After just one year, 93 percent of the students participating in the program at one of the four high-poverty pilot schools were either performing on grade level or not referred for special education.

"Early intervention in reading by trained staff is critical," says Grego. "If we can get more struggling readers on grade level, we can eliminate the need for referral and ensure that special services go to those students who truly have a disability."

Believing that access to the regular curriculum is vital, the district uses a co-teaching model to mainstream the majority of special-needs students and keep "pull outs" to a minimum. Remediation and enrichment camps also are offered before and after school, on Saturdays, and during the summer.

Ongoing professional development for school board members, administrators, teachers, and support staff is tied to the district's goal of success for all students. "My philosophy is that we're in this business for student achievement," says Elia. "That has been our greatest challenge and the one that we've met with the greatest success."

Growth, financial constraints pose challenges

As a fast-growing district in the fast-growing Sun Belt, Hillsborough County is adding more than 6,000 students each year. The district has built 65 new buildings during the past decade, and officials estimate that another 30 schools will need to open over the next three to five years.

While the explosive growth shows no signs of slowing down, the district continues to deal with the lowest impact fee in the state for residential developers. A new Florida law mandating smaller class sizes and lower teacher-student ratios only complicates matters.

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NORFOLK

OBSESSION WITH RESULTS YIELDS DIVIDENDS FOR STUDENTS

For Norfolk Public Schools (NPS), closing the achievement gap is more than a mandate, it's an obsession.

"Our staff members live, eat, and breathe our goal of improving the quality of teaching and learning for all," says Theresa Whibley, NPS school board chairman. "Everything we do is focused on improving our students' academic achievement."

NORFOLK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Board members (as of June 30, 2005): Theresa Whibley, Chair; Ursula D. Rhodes, Vice Chair; Barry C. Bishop, Wilson B. "Chip" Dodson III, George W. Cook, James T. Driggers, Lillian P. Wright.

Governance structure: Board members are appointed to two-year terms by the City Council and serve at-large.

Superintendent: Stephen C. Jones

Number of students: 36,724

Number of schools: 49

Number of staff: 4,650

Percentage of students by race/ethnicity:

African American: 68.6%

Asian American: 2%

Hispanic: 2.8%

White: 26.4%

Percentage of students receiving free and/or reduced-price lunch: 63.4%

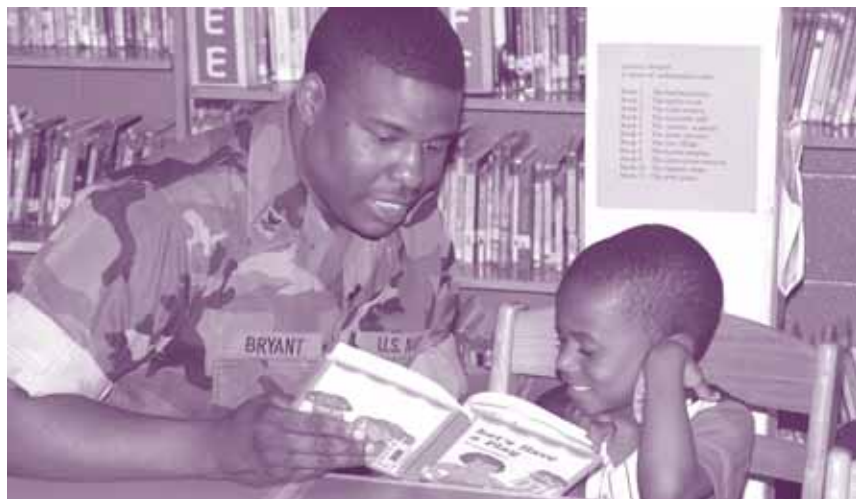
Percentage of students in special education: 14.8%

Percentage of students who are English language learners: less than 1% (.006%)

Per-pupil expenditures: \$7,403

Annual operating budget: \$283.4 million

Website: www.nps.k12.va.us



Sherwood Forest Elementary School PTA president Michael Bryant takes some time from his busy day to read with his son Justen in the school media center. Norfolk parents are encouraged to be active participants in the public schools. Bryant visits and volunteers in the school at least three times a week.

The laser-like focus on student achievement shows. Since 1998, NPS has narrowed the black-white achievement gap by more than 20 percentage points in some areas and has increased student achievement by as much as 62 percent at some grade levels.

Given the district's high poverty rate — more than 60 percent of NPS students qualify for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program — the results are even more remarkable. Year-end results for 2003-04, for example, show that the vast majority of NPS third-, fifth-, and eighth-graders are performing at or above grade level in English, mathematics, and writing.

And, counter to national trends, NPS students continue to gain academically as they move from the elementary to secondary school levels. In 2003-04, 86 percent of NPS high school students met state standards in English and writing, while 88 percent met state standards in Algebra II.

Now the district must focus on getting the final 10 to 15 percent of its students on grade level. As part of its vision to become a world-class school system, the NPS board of education and school administrators will settle for nothing less than 100 percent proficiency.

"If we're going to finish this race and get to the top of the summit, it's going to be on my watch," says Stephen C. Jones, who joined NPS as superintendent just prior to the start of the 2005-06 school year. "We're going to have to dig deeper and give even more to bring them all into the fold."

"A fire in the belly"

Long before No Child Left Behind, NPS recognized the importance of disaggregating achievement data, raising academic standards, and increasing performance expectations for all students.

As leaders of a minority-majority school system, Norfolk's school board was acutely aware of the damage diminished expectations can have on student learning. By focusing exclusively on student success, the board has narrowed its agenda and unified the system behind the overarching goal of 100 percent proficiency.

"When I interviewed with the board, every question they put in front of me — every question — dealt with improving instruction and how we're going to not only move things forward, but ratchet things up even further," Jones says. "For school board members to speak so passionately and eloquently about the instructional program and not talk about politics or funding means wonderful things can happen for children."

The focus on instruction and shared commitment for success are infused throughout the school system, Norfolk officials say. Teachers, principals, parents, students, elected officials, business leaders, and community members have all put their shoulders behind the NPS wheel, whether it's staying after school to help tutor struggling students or providing corporate funds and facilitators to strengthen district leadership.

"You can talk to just about anyone in this community, and they will tell you that we're on a trajectory to become a world-class school system," says Jones. "That desire, that fire in the belly, just reverberates everywhere you go, from the security staff to teachers and administrators all the way up to the school board, the business community, and the mayor."

Smart decisions yield results

Vision alone, however, can't account for the district's success. Highly focused board agendas and a data-driven approach to decisions have enabled NPS to shift resources where they are needed most.

"The secret to our success has been a belief that the children of Norfolk come first," says Whibley. "Personal agendas fall away, and we have developed a remarkably united group as a result."

Smart decisions, from strengthening and expanding early childhood education programs to shifting more than \$1 million from central administration to classroom instruction, are yielding significant results.

And, thanks to the district's hefty investment in data warehousing and analysis, teachers can now create individual student profiles and use real-time testing results to modify and adapt instruction on an ongoing basis.

Administrators can "slice and dice" their schools' data by student, teacher, classroom, grade level, course, or subject area. Now, rather than rely on "gut instinct" or other subjective measures, teachers and administrators can pinpoint problem areas and make needed adjustments before students slip further behind.

Teachers also have access to web-based lesson plans that are tied to the curriculum and are based on best practices for engaging learners, especially those

traditionally viewed as most at-risk for school failure due to socioeconomic status, disability, and language and cultural barriers.

"The accountability system here is really incredible," Jones says. "We can see how we stack up against ourselves and other school districts as well as how we're doing against state and federal accountability measures. This allows us to check our progress over time and not simply wait for a post-mortem from the state."

Galvanizing business and community support

As Norfolk continues to close the achievement gap, and close in on 100 percent proficiency, business and community support continues to build.

Funding and scarce resources remain a concern, but the business community has stepped up to the plate by strengthening the district's leadership development program, serving on district advisory boards, and promoting NPS as a vital part of the region's overall economic development initiative.

"From my perspective in a business role here, the district has done an extraordinarily good job in making it possible for the business community to be helpful," says Conrad Hall, president and chief executive officer of Trader Publishing Co., one of Norfolk's largest employers. "We've been invited in, in a wonderful way, and have developed public-private partnerships on a number of different fronts."

As part of an ongoing partnership with the Greater Norfolk Corp., for example, principals are benefiting from monthly professional development programs focused on helping them become better leaders, from hiring and motivating staff to fiscal management and strategic planning. In turn, business leaders are gaining a greater appreciation for the challenges school leaders face each day.

"Our people have gotten as much out of it as I think the folks in the school system who have participated have," Hall says. "People who don't know much about public education have no idea of the challenges in those jobs."

Norfolk business and community leaders also started and support a local foundation that makes the dream of a college education a reality for every public

school student in the region who has the grades, attendance, and desire. So far, more than 30,000 students have received more than \$110 million in financial aid.

"In some ways it's a blessing in disguise that we don't have a lot of wealth here," Conrad says. "This isn't the kind of city where one or two major corporations can shower money on everything and make it happen. It requires a lot of people being involved in order to get anything done. At the end of the day, strength comes from that."

The end result also means more support for public education, a critical component for any urban school system.

"The real test is everybody working together as a city to give our youngsters every bit of help we can," says Hall. "We want to give them the best schooling we can, we want to make sure they go to college, and we want to hire them when they're done. Then, if they come back and help others do the same thing, that's the ultimate test."

Even with a supportive business community, NPS faces significant financial challenges and lingering misperceptions about the quality of education the district offers. The district has squeezed just about every dime possible out of the central office. Recruiting and maintaining top-quality teachers will require additional resources, according to NPS officials.

"One of the greatest challenges we face is that despite all of the recognition we've received nationally, there's still a large number of people in our community who look at the district through a lens that was accurate 10 years ago," Jones says. "We need more people in our community to understand that things have changed, that we've improved significantly and are holding our own in terms of accountability."

"Resources are scarce for public education," agrees Whibley. "As a board we need to help rally the community around our request for increased financial support. We also must do more to get the word out to the community not only about the success we already have achieved, but also about the target we have set for becoming a world class school system by 2010." ■

SAN ANTONIO

GOOD GOVERNANCE TRANSFORMS THE DISTRICT

Five years ago, the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) Board of Trustees was known more for its divisiveness than its effectiveness.

Political agendas and competing demands from special-interest groups made headlines, with the needs of the district's 57,000 students seemingly taking a back seat. Today trustees — and the community — take pride in how they govern the diverse school system, which now focuses its time and resources on improving student achievement.

As a result, the once embattled district is now thriving: student achievement is up,



First grade teacher Diane Harris reads to her students at James Bowie Elementary School in San Antonio, Texas.

SAN ANTONIO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Board members: Julian H. Treviño, chairman. James Howard, Thomas C. Lopez, Justin R. Rodriguez, Doug Sellers, Alex Talamantez, Carlos Villarreal.

Governance structure:
Members are elected by district
and serve four-year terms.

Superintendent: Rubén Olivárez
Number of students: 57,108
Number of schools: 94
Number of staff: 8,000
Percentage of students by
race/ethnicity:
Hispanic: 86.5%
African American: 9.3%
White (not Hispanic): 3.8%
Asian or Pacific Island: 0.2%
American Indian: 0.1%
Percentage of students receiving
free and/or reduced-price
lunch: 90.2%
Percentage of students in special
education: 12.8%
Percentage of students who
are English language learners:
18.9%
Per-pupil expenditures: \$8,992
Website: www.saisd.net

the achievement gap is narrowing, and bond projects are being delivered on time and on budget.

By focusing on its policy making role and aligning its agenda with the nine core functions the district identified in its strategic plan, the board has structured its work more clearly around teaching and learning.

"Being very clear about roles, responsibilities and the purpose of the board has made a significant difference," says Julian Treviño, chairman of the SAISD Board of Trustees. "You need to create a culture where people recognize that the whole is more important than individual members."

Superintendent Rubén Olivárez agrees. "From day one, we agreed to honor the role of the board as one of governance, the role of the superintendent as management of the district, and the role of the staff as the implementation team," he says.

Believing that accountability for results must be shared at all levels, the SAISD board has set an ambitious goal: to be recognized as an exemplary school board by the Texas Association of School Administrators this year. In May, SAISD was named a regional winner. In August, the district was named one of six state finalists for the prestigious recognition, which focuses on governance issues.

Better teamwork spurs innovation

Better teamwork among board members and between the board and administration has united SAISD behind the common goal of providing excellence and equity for all students.

A minority-majority school system, SAISD's student body is 86.5 percent Hispanic, 9.3 percent African American, and 3.8 percent white. More than 90 percent of SAISD students live below the federal poverty line.

"If you're going to be on the board here, you have to have a passion for inner-city children," says Treviño. "Everything we do needs to be focused on how we can make it better for kids."

The new collaborative spirit has encouraged and strengthened the board's relationship with teachers and the San Antonio Alliance, a local affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers. Teachers sit on many district committees and help plan new teacher orientation and other programs.

Better teamwork is also spurring innovation as the district continues to focus on closing the performance gap between SAISD and its more-affluent peers statewide.

The district recently received a \$4.8 million grant designed to help ninth-grade students who are two or more years behind grade level master critical literacy skills. The grant is part of the district's ongoing initiative to create smaller learning communities that are more attuned and responsive to the needs of at-risk students.

This initiative also includes the district's move toward pre-K through 8 schools to prevent the drop in achievement that typically occurs when students transition from elementary school.

"Elementary schools are like mother hens watching over their chicks," says Treviño. "They focus on teaching the child rather than teaching the course."

As a result, sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students in the district's K-8 schools are outperforming their peers in traditional middle schools by as much as 10 to 15 percent, according to Treviño.

"With pre-K through 8 schools, discipline improves, academics improve, and parent communication improves," says Treviño. "As a result, kids don't get lost in the shuffle."

SAISD has also strengthened and expanded its early childhood education program from 200 to more than 4,800 three- and four-year-olds to help ensure that students enter kindergarten ready and able to learn.

The district's investment in early childhood education and smaller learning

communities is paying off. SAISD had growth in 90 percent of the 31 academic achievement indicators tracked by state tests, while the state had growth in 74 percent. SAISD has an attendance rate just under 95 percent and an annual dropout rate of less than 1 percent.

"When you have a good plan and create a work structure and a decision-making process that supports and tracks the plan, and provide the training and leadership needed, it's very effective," says Olivárez.

Local business leaders agree. "I am very pleased with the spirit of this board in working together," says Tom Frost, senior chairman of Frost National Bank. "They know how to solve problems in educating our young people. They review plans and programs and have good teamwork, always with the focus on the objective of educating the students in our city."

"Seven heart beats, one heart"

In just a few short years, San Antonio has been transformed from a district fraught with controversy to one that is united behind the goal of providing all children equity and excellence in education.

School officials now say the board's commitment to effective governance represents "seven heartbeats, one heart."

As part of this transformation, the district has opened lines of communication

between SAISD officials and the community. A Citizens Oversight Committee now oversees more than \$600 million in construction projects, ensuring that tax dollars are well spent on renovations, additions, and new facilities.

The district has also established campus-based groups that meet in job-alike or role-alike sessions to ask questions and offer suggestions for school and district improvement. Input from these groups and from community forums helps district officials stay abreast of teacher, parent, and community concerns, and factored heavily into the board's five-year strategic plan.

Called the "Magnificent Seven" by Olivárez, the board has received extensive professional development and training in governance, financial management, strategic planning, and other leadership topics.

"This board, along with the administration, has embraced accountability," says Carrie Baker Wells, chair of the education task force for the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce and a member of the Texas Business and Education Coalition. "They have worked with the business community to set high academic standards."

Ultimately, though, the board's effectiveness rests on "people of good will," according to Treviño. "Sometimes we don't agree, but we always show respect for each other intellectually as well as personally." ■

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY CONTINUED

"Growth is a major focus every day," says Elia. "We've been very proactive in building but the growth is just phenomenal."

Like many urban districts, SDHC is also finding that the number of students who bring complex learning challenges to school is also increasing.

"Our two biggest issues are growth and diversity," says Olson. "Growth is impinging on our choice plan and making it difficult to hire enough teachers. We spend a lot of our budget each year on finding land and building."

Working with staff, the school board has found creative ways to reduce expenses and still preserve high-cost programs, like athletics, that district officials believe are important even if they don't directly affect the classroom. Olson says using

data to drive decisions helps take emotion and politics out of the equation.

"Sometimes it's heartbreaking to say this program that's cherished and that you've loved isn't moving children forward," she says. "When you have resources as limited as ours you can't let your emotions rule. We have to support what the data tells us and take the time to talk it through."

Making every penny count has earned the trust and support of the community. SDHC has received Florida's coveted Seal of Best Financial Management.

Helping the community understand the need for more resources is critical, however, if the district is going to reach each child, especially those experiencing the most extreme poverty, school officials say.

"We rank 47th or 48th in terms of per-capita expenditures and 19th in

per-capita income," says Olson. "It's not a lack of ability; it's a lack of will."

Olson says board members take their role as advocates for children and the school system seriously. "As board members, we're in the community a lot, and it's our responsibility to tell the story," she says. "We need to remind people that the children who come to us don't always know their names, addresses, or letters. They may not understand that you can put sounds together to convey ideas.

"When the poverty gets extremely high, the quality of the poverty changes and the issues children bring with them are much more extreme," Olson says. "Every child is not at the same place, and the community has a piece here to help parents understand how to do everything they can to get children ready." ■

The CUBE Annual Award for Urban School Board Excellence recognizes successfully governed school districts. The award is presented to the school district that best demonstrates excellence in board governance, closing the achievement gap, academic achievement, and community engagement.

Each CUBE member will receive the application form for the 2006 award for Urban School Board Excellence next April. All applications received by May 30, 2006 will be considered in the next judging process.

The 2006 award for Urban School Board Excellence will be announced at the CUBE Annual Conference banquet in Phoenix, AZ.



ABOUT CUBE

NSBA's Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE), the urban component of NSBA's National Affiliate program, addresses the programmatic, fiscal, and governance challenges of urban public education on behalf of its 107 member school boards and the more than 8 million students they serve. Through legislative advocacy, conferences, workshops, seminars, and publications, CUBE has been in the forefront of cultivating excellence in urban public schools for more than three decades.

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ABOUT NSBA

The National School Boards Association is the nationwide advocacy organization for public school governance. NSBA's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education in the United States through local school board leadership. Founded in 1940, NSBA is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States and the school boards of the District of Columbia, Hawaii, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

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