

MEMORANDUM

TO: Holly Radcliffe
Florida Department of Education Paper Reduction Contact

FROM: Alan Androski
Madison County School District Paper Reduction Representative

DATE: August 31, 2007

SUBJECT: 2007 Madison County Annual Paper Reduction Report

I. Introduction The following report is based on information collected by informal surveys and interviews with various employees from the Madison County schools. An effort was made to include individuals from a wide range of job descriptions including administrators, teachers (including ESE teachers), paraprofessionals, food service personnel, custodial staff, secretaries, guidance counselors, staffing specialists, parents, and others. The general feeling in our county is that there have been some positive actions to reduce paper work, however, there are new burdens overshadowing the gains that have been made. One teacher commented that she thought the paperwork burdens have increased over the past few years. Because our county has a small population coupled with one of the lowest average household incomes in the state, we face greater obstacles compared to many other counties. Our county's intention is to build on the data collected from this past year, increase participation in paper reduction efforts, and expand the program. Our goal is to reduce paperwork and data entry burdens. We must continue to heighten our awareness, identify the reason (as well as the source) of burdensome requirements, forge problem-solving ideas, and fight to eliminate excessive, time-consuming, paper work requirements. We want to enable our staff to maximize their time helping the children of our county learn and develop into successful citizens. This report will be presented to the Madison County School Board on September 4, 2007.

II. Positive Evidences of reducing the paperwork and data collection burden in Madison County School District:

- 1) AIP's and personal student improvement plans. Teachers are very thankful that AIP's are no longer required for every student.
- 2) The online process for documenting workshop attendance and storing data for teacher certification is working well, however, it adds a new burden to one person at each school site to enter all of the workshops. The system could be improved if individual teachers had the capability to enter workshop information into the system which could then be approved by the site coordinator. As it is now, the school site coordinators sometimes get so busy, they get behind in entering the workshops. Then the workshop attendee must keep checking the website to see when their information comes up.
- 3) Schools have begun to take more advantage of computer network drives for sharing data and documents. For example, a network drive has been established at MCHS for the Math Department to share data and documents.

- 4) There are now flexible reporting methods for teacher's lesson plans without requiring duplication of the same information. For example, lesson plans can now be accepted in any one of the following formats: paper copy, electronic file, or website.
- 5) Administrators are provided portable electronic devices to observe teachers in the classroom and document performance appraisal competencies.
- 6) Grades and Attendance records are being done electronically. Discipline documentation, referrals and email progress reports to parents can be handled using the same system.
- 7) Media Centers are issuing books electronically. Also, some schools are issuing and electronically tracking textbooks utilizing bar codes and bar code readers.
- 8) Automatic dialing systems are available for parent notifications.
- 9) Some work requests are being submitted electronically.
- 10) School Improvement Plans have become less burdensome thanks to the state's revision of the guidelines.

III. Concerns:

- 1) Student portfolios, to provide alternative documentation for grade level advancement, place a huge, time-consuming paperwork burden upon many teachers. When a student does not make the appropriate scores for normal advancement, the burden and pressure falls upon the teacher to spend numerous hours to try to come up with documentation that will prove that the student still deserves to be promoted. A teacher can even be pressured to provide this documentation when the teacher does not think the student should be promoted.
- 2) The performance pay "STAR" and "MAP" system has created a tremendously burdensome requirement for countless hours of new paperwork. The state has begun the program too quickly without having the supporting framework to implement it. For example, at one point in the 2005-06 school year, teachers were told that PAEC would provide a database of exams for the non-FCAT classes, but it did not happen. Statisticians in Madison County had to spend countless hours to devise a fair system of formulas to compare the FCAT subject with the non-FCAT subject teachers. It is a big mess requiring numerous hours of work from the local district to support a program mandated by the state.
- 3) Progress Monitoring is a valuable tool, but costly- at least one school has had to forfeit a teaching position to have a full time employee coordinate, collect, analyze, sort, and make reports related to progress monitoring. Additionally, teachers have had to spend excessive hours, and schools have had to spend large sums of money to implement progress monitoring. The state seems to have failed to apply the spirit of "Recommendation 7" of the Report on the Recommendations of the 2006 Paper Reduction Task Force. Recommendation 7 states: "The official analysis of legislation by either legislative chamber shall include an estimation of the "burden hours" created by the proposed legislation." If burden hours were considered, the number of hours was grossly underestimated or the legislature was passed despite the number of hours estimated.

IV. Recommendations for FLDOE:

- 1) FLDOE should provide access for school districts to an internet-based survey, concerning paperwork reduction. The survey should be established by FLDOE to ensure that data being collected throughout the state is consistent and matches the goals of the Paper Reduction Task Force. Furthermore, by FLDOE establishing the survey, it will remove the burden from every district of creating their own and will provide a tool to some districts that may not have otherwise created their own survey. The survey does not have to be long and it should be accessible by school district employees and parents of students within the district. While the survey will provide data to the state for an overall statistical picture, the survey should also be readily available to each district to use at any time they want to collect or analyze the data.
- 2) More opportunities should be made available for districts to communicate and share ideas related to the paper reduction initiatives. This might include participating in any future meetings of a State Paper Reduction Task Force or establishing an annual statewide or regional meeting for district paper reduction representatives (perhaps 6 months from the submission deadline for the district annual report). School districts could be provided with the option of participating in person or via video conference for these meetings. An even larger audience could be addressed if a statewide event of approximately 30 minutes is televised live, while school district personnel from all over the state watch and have the opportunity to phone or email questions.
- 3) Establish a "Best Practices" internet database of the best ideas from around the state along with point of contact information (sunshine connections). The paper reduction annual reports from different Florida districts are available online, but it would be a burden for each district to read them all. The state seems to be failing "Recommendation 8" from the Report on Recommendations of the Paper Reduction Task Force (Feb 2006): "The Department of Education will annually review the progress of school and district implementation of recommendations, will review the reports of the district task forces, and *will report findings annually to local school districts.*" These "Best Practices" could also be shared at a meeting or video conference for all district's paper reduction task forces, as well as any state-wide meeting of Superintendents, Principals, etc.
- 4) Change the due date for the annual report to sometime other than September 1st. Classroom teachers have been asked to serve on the local paper reduction task forces and September 1st is a date which occurs at one of the busiest times of the year for the majority of school personnel - the beginning of the traditional school year calendar.
- 5) Provide more information regarding recent changes in the state's requirements related to paperwork or data collection. Most teachers in our district hear about changes only by word of mouth. An email could be sent to communicate this in succinct and timely manner. A topic for "paperwork reduction" could be added to the list of choices for subscriptions to sign up for on the sunshine connections paperless communications subscription sign-up web page (this topic was not available as of 8-24-07 but was requested via email to the webmaster). Searching the paperless communications database is helpful but very time-consuming because one would have to read and through numerous lengthy documents to find useful information that should be provided somehow in a more succinct manner.

- 6) Provide more guidelines and training for the district paperwork reduction task force members. Numerous hours have been spent searching the FLDOE website for information regarding paperwork reduction. Training would significantly reduce the amount of time trying to find obscure web pages within FLDOE's webpages that relate to paper reduction. There may be helpful information from the internet or other sources that district task forces do not know about. Some of the suggested recommendations of this report may already be in place.
- 7) Establish some guidelines/suggestions for the writing of the annual paperwork reduction report. Some districts are submitting reports with numerous pages and others' reports have very few pages. With some limited guidelines from the state, the district task forces could provide more consistent and useful information in order to help the entire state "team" of district task forces. Additionally, when guidelines are in place, the expectations are clear and it reduces the amount of time required by those generating the report.
- 8) Teacher Appraisal Evaluations should be done electronically with the capability for teachers to add comments/notes concerning evidence of completing competencies.
- 9) Cancel the merit pay system until the appropriate framework is established to support it.
- 10) The state should provide software and other technology such as electronic scoring and data management machines to schools required to use progress monitoring. There have been rumors of a "Progress Monitoring Resource Network", but no one seems to know much about it or if it is in operation yet. Provide more technology support, or money to purchase the technology, for schools at which progress monitoring is mandated by the state.
- 11) Complete the Electronic IEP program. Madison County is listed as one of the "Phase One" counties on the FLDOE website concerning electronic IEP's. Phase One counties were supposed to utilize electronic IEP's beginning in 2006. Information on the FLDOE's website concerning Electronic IEP's is misleading. The website mentions that the Phase One Counties started electronic IEP's in 2006 which is not true. The software to support the Electronic IEP's has had several revisions and is still not being used in Madison County.
- 12) Coordinate attendance databases for "VPK" and "School Readiness Programs". The same children are often enrolled in VPK for part of the day and in the School Readiness program for the remainder of the day. This requires the teacher to do two separate attendance forms for these students. These reports containing the same attendance information are sent to the Pre-K Coalition. The reports are sent to the SAME people, but the Pre-K Coalition will not disburse funds unless they are on separate forms. This double reporting of the same data requires lots of extra time on both the teachers' part and the school personnel who must send the reports.

V. Recommendations for Madison County Schools:

- 1) Establish a Madison County Paper Reduction Task Force. Representatives from each school as well as parents and other school district personnel would provide more impetus to the program. This would foster involvement of more individuals and provide for rotation of the district representative - being routinely replaced by someone who has served on the local district task force and is already familiar with the program. Meetings should be kept to a minimum, for example, twice a year.

- 2) Provide a short time for the district task force representative to speak at the County Meeting (entire district) at the beginning of the school year for the purpose of explaining current paper reduction initiatives, soliciting paper reduction ideas, and reminding all that they have a voice in the reduction of required administrative tasks which seem burdensome. The current communications method of providing the district with an email point of contact solicits minimal responses.
- 3) Increase the use of computer network "share" drives at each school site location. When data is stored in electronic form and made accessible to those in need, it provides the opportunity to edit data that already exists rather than start with a blank document, thus saving many hours of labor. At the same time that data is made accessible to more personnel, there must also be controls to guard against improper disclosure of privacy act information. In addition, more technology training must be provided- as more data can be shared electronically, it is vital that teachers and other personnel be trained to access the data and safeguard privacy data.
- 4) Explore the feasibility of establishing a database accessible by faculty that contains student information such as, GPA, course transcripts, etc. For example, by making a student's course transcripts, GPA, and other "cumulative folder" information available to teachers, it would save numerous hours for the teacher trying to look up the information as well as for the guidance staff trying to find the information and provide it to the teachers. For example, if a teacher wants to check to see if a student in the high school has passed a prerequisite course, he or she could check the database rather than have to call or visit guidance. This database would save guidance staff and teachers time, as well as help ensure they are in the proper class.
- 5) Larger school districts often have more monies to purchase expensive technologies that directly reduce the paperwork burden. Unfortunately, equipment for an expensive system usually costs the same amount to any customer, regardless of the size of the county's operating funds. Take advantage of more grants to secure technology that directly reduces the paperwork burden. The state offers grant-writing workshops. At least one of the employees of the county who attends a workshop should focus on ideas related to paper reduction. Keep abreast of the latest technologies that can assist in reducing the hours required for paperwork and data collection. One or more members from the district task force could attend a technology trade show(s) and report their findings. The purchase of software such as FCAT Test Writer to assist in the tremendously burdensome area of Progress Monitoring, should be encouraged and budgeted.
- 6) Forms, forms, forms. The recent beginning of the school year reminds us of all of the forms that must be filled out by teachers, students, and parents/guardians. All district personnel should be looking for smarter ways to store this data so that it will not have to be rewritten numerous times and handled by numerous people. For example, student emergency forms could be stored electronically and perhaps entered and/or updated by parents at open house or through the internet annually. Another example is the excessive amount of hard copies of paper provided to teachers in their back-to-school teacher packets. Over half of the documents could simply be left on a network drive for access when needed.
- 7) The number of pay check stubs which document electronic transfer could be reduced or eliminated. An online system could provide a printout for whoever wants a hard copy. Electronic

Fund transfer could be made mandatory for all employees, or encouraged for as many as possible.

8) Continue to work with teachers to reduce the amount of time required for lesson plans. If standards need to be listed for every lesson, it can be very time-consuming. Teachers should work with textbook publishers because many provide correlation to Florida Standards. Administrators can give teachers different options such as allowing teachers to simply report all of the standards covered in a week or month rather than every day, or teachers could attach a printout of textbook correlations to Florida standards and highlight the standards covered in that course.

9) Look for ways to revise the attendance procedures. Teachers are required to record attendance electronically, and later must verify that they are correct by signing a paper printout. This is double work. If teachers keep no paper attendance records in their room, then they are simply signing the paper for what they have already reported in the computer and have no way to verify accuracy. Other teachers, who keep a paper copy attendance record in addition to the computer, can verify the computer printout from their notes, but a more efficient way might exist. If more attendance codes (or a space for comments concerning attendance) were available to document special circumstances in the computer, such as leaving early to sign out, the teachers would not have to keep a paper document which has to be continually checked and rechecked with the computer.

10) Analyze the packet of papers dealing with life skills, known as "FOCUS" sheets, and determine how to reduce the burden of documenting these skills. Here is a quote from a teacher- "Topics include things like time management, personal values, occupations, economy, career planning, self concept, etc. Some teachers are supposed to document every activity and date that we cover this great variety of topics. There are 30 "competencies". I find this tedious, and though these skills are very important and we probably all cover these things in the course of our teaching responsibilities . . . with all the other things we have to do, to document dates and activities is cumbersome."

11) Consider allowing a few more persons at different school sites to be trained and given the authority to enter workshop and teacher recertification information in the ePDC website. (see para II.2).

12) Avoid duplicate mailings of school related information when one per household (with multiple children in the same school) is sufficient.

VI. Conclusion Madison County needs to sharpen its efforts to help reduce the administrative burdens on the staff. Teachers and others are anxious to see more done to reduce the hours required for paperwork and documentation- especially "double work". Madison County administrators are willing to help and look forward to the state increasing its assistance in this initiative. The object of this report was not to place blame, but to provide an honest and open dialogue for discussing the issues at hand. Some of the observations may be incorrect, simply due to lack of knowledge. In addition to the district and state, the local task force will also accept the challenge for looking for ways to improve its efforts as we all work together toward our paper reduction goals.