



## Realigning Resources for District Success

### *Duval County Public Schools Final Report - Executive Summary*

**Jonathan Travers and Kristen Ferris**  
**September 2011**

Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) is poised to take action today that will lead to serving all students more effectively. Although the challenges are significant, including deep budget cuts, the district made the strategic choice to look thoroughly at how resources are currently allocated and now has a foundation for making decisions that will lead to greater teaching effectiveness, more successful turnaround schools, and targeted attention for students who need it most. This report lays out what has to be done, why and how. It shows that DCPS will have to make tough trade-offs, continue to work hard and to make the most of exceptional community support. It won't be easy, but the return on investment for the students of Duval County and the community more broadly warrants the effort.

Like most school districts in the United States, DCPS has experienced deep budget cuts over the last few years and faces additional cuts in the near future. While dollars are decreasing, expectations for school and student performance are increasing with the transition to common core standards and more robust accountability systems. Duval County, like many districts, also faces a significant achievement gap between higher poverty and minority students and their peers. Rather than do less with a shrinking budget, DCPS must rethink resources to do more, both raising the bar and closing the gap.

Complicating the issue is that DCPS's current resources are both few and inflexible.<sup>1</sup> At \$8.5K per pupil, DCPS is one of the lowest funded districts ERS has studied.<sup>2</sup> And, DCPS currently spends the lowest share on central management functions and highest share on instruction of peer districts – meaning that closing future budget gaps will be exceptionally difficult without reducing spending on schools in some way. Florida's class size requirement has forced the district to spread resources broadly to support more uniform class sizes, rather than target funding to specific needs. At the school level, principals are forced to invest more in the quantity of teachers vs. the quality of instruction.

Given these constraints, DCPS must aggressively shift resources to maximize the full potential of its existing time, people, and money. Raising the bar for all students while also closing the gap will require improving teaching effectiveness system-wide, and organizing time and staff in new ways that target resources to highest need areas. This report describes how DCPS, even with its low funding level, can reduce costs, rethink resource use, and make limited new investments that will improve teaching effectiveness and overall student performance.

#### **ERS Recommendation Areas**

- I. Measuring Teacher Effectiveness**
- II. Strengthening Teaching Teams**
- III. Targeting Time and Attention**
- IV. Leveraging Turnaround**
- V. Matching Funding to Need**

<sup>1</sup> ERS analysis focused on SY0910. Unless otherwise specified, all data comes from SY0910.

<sup>2</sup> ERS calculates funding level based on PreK-12 operating expenses, including categorical funding (e.g. Title I).

- I. **Measuring Teacher Effectiveness:** Launch leadership development effort to support implementation of new evaluation system, which will then inform hiring, assignment, professional development, career growth and compensation.

The quality of teaching students receive is the single most important school-based factor in whether, how, and how much they will learn.<sup>3</sup> To provide the foundation to ensure that every student has an effective teacher, DCPS must first measure teaching effectiveness accurately. In accordance with Senate Bill 736, DCPS has rolled out a new teacher evaluation tool for the 2011-2012 school year that is a significant improvement upon the previous tool. The district must use this redesign as an opportunity to transform teacher evaluation from a compliance-driven activity used solely for punitive actions to a tool used to raise the bar for teacher effectiveness and drive meaningful improvements in practice. And while transforming the evaluation process will require significant upfront investment in school leadership and other resources, the cost is minimal when compared to the opportunity it creates for the district to restructure human capital resources more effectively. Over the coming years, DCPS can use new effectiveness information to improve its teacher pipeline, better target professional development to teacher need, and ensure compensation resources support district priorities and teacher excellence.

- II. **Strengthening Teaching Teams:** Build highly effective teaching teams that collaborate regularly with expert support by bringing together pieces of DCPS's current >\$100 million investment in instructional support.

Organizing teachers into diverse teams that work together with an instructional expert to analyze data and adjust instruction is another important way to improve teaching effectiveness. DCPS already spends over \$100 million on school-based instructional support; these resources must be brought together to better support highly effective teaching teams. The first steps toward this will be to ensure the teacher contract supports using time for team collaboration, and to build a clear model for how collaborative time should be used. In addition, principals will need support around making more strategic team assignments. Finally, DCPS should utilize existing high-performing teachers as experts to support team collaboration. This will require creating a formal teacher leader role with pay commensurate with increased responsibility. Pay should be funded initially from community resources, and over time from a restructured compensation system. Overall, DCPS can significantly advance teaching effectiveness by strengthening teaching teams primarily through better use of existing resources; no new investment is required over the long term.

- III. **Targeting Time and Attention:** Improve individualization of instruction by scheduling students more flexibly and aligning interventions.

High-performing schools organize resources school-wide through schedules and staffing plans that target additional time and individual attention to those students who need it most and to highest priority subject areas. Making the most of student time and staffing is essential since DCPS students spend less total time in school than other ERS partner districts and schools have fewer staff per student. To do so, DCPS must better differentiate group size, teacher loads (the total number of unique students for which a teacher has instructional responsibility), time, and instructional programs. By offsetting targeted reductions in group sizes and teacher loads in highest need areas with increases in elementary resource and secondary non-core class sizes, schools can increase targeted individual attention within existing resource levels. To better maximize available time, DCPS should improve and expand existing interventions targeting higher needs students. Action is needed to improve the fidelity of existing interventions, expand the menu of interventions available, and provide mechanisms for teacher communication and information-sharing to increase alignment across interventions that a student receives.

---

<sup>3</sup> Hanushek, E.A. & Rivkin, S.G. (2010). "Generalizations About Using Value-Added Measures of Teaching Quality." *American Economic Review*, 100(2). pp. 267-271.

---

**IV. Leveraging Turnaround:** Restructure and increase investment in turnaround schools to attract and develop top talent and better support students' readiness to learn.

The current influx of federal resources and national attention on the subject of turnaround is unprecedented and creates an opportunity and obligation for districts to use information on what works to dramatically increase success rates of low-performing schools system-wide. This will require taking very different approaches to attracting highly effective teachers to turnaround schools and building transformational leadership. It will also require complementing DCPS' current turnaround investments that focus on teaching effectiveness with additional resources that support students' readiness to learn. Finally, DCPS must also be deliberate about tailoring resources and strategy to specific school needs and early indicators of success and failure. This will take improved monitoring tools and a better mechanism for customizing turnaround approach based on data.

**V. Matching Funding to Need:** Free up resources invested in smaller school size to increase funding based on prioritized need.

Driving sustained and district-wide school improvement requires funding all schools equitably - at levels that match student need. This is particularly important in low-funded districts like DCPS where investment in core instruction is already so limited. In DCPS, the single largest driver in school funding variation after adjusting for difference in student need levels across schools is school size at the elementary level. Overall, DCPS pays a "size premium" of \$26 million for its elementary schools with less than 500 students. While DCPS can reduce the small school spending premium in its current school portfolio by changing school designs and staffing patterns, redirecting a significant portion of the size premium requires school consolidation. Consolidation decisions should be made based on multiple factors including but not limited to cost differentials and overall levels of student performance and growth.

Duval County Public Schools faces a pivotal moment. As standards for academic achievement rise and resource levels fall, the district must build on current efforts and be more deliberate than ever about the way it uses people, time, and money to support student success. Rather than do less with a shrinking budget, DCPS and the Jacksonville community must use this pivotal moment to take bold action, making hard choices to organize resources to ensure both equity and excellence.

***To download the full summary visit:***

***[http://erstrategies.org/resources/details/realigning\\_resources\\_for\\_district\\_success/](http://erstrategies.org/resources/details/realigning_resources_for_district_success/)***

---