

School Turnaround in Miami-Dade County Public Schools

OVERVIEW

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) announced the creation of a new district entity, the Education Transformation Office (ETO), in 2010 to oversee the turnaround of 19 underperforming schools. ETO was created as a separate region of MDCPS, the fourth largest school system in the United States, with the objective to “sustain, build, and accelerate improvement in struggling schools.” Unlike other school regions, ETO reports directly to Superintendent Alberto Carvahlo and has direct authority over all aspects of school programs and operations.

DISTRICT BACKGROUND 2010-11:	
Enrollment	347K students
\$/Pupil	\$7,378
% Free & Reduced-price Lunch	70 %
% Special Education	22 %
% English Language Learners	18 %
Year Turnaround Program Initiated	2010-2011
# of Turnaround Schools	
• Elementary	9
• Middle	7
• High	10

ETO is led by Assistant Superintendent Nikolai Vitti, who joined Superintendent Carvahlo’s staff in the summer of 2010 from the Florida State Department of Education, where he was the deputy chancellor of school improvement and student achievement. Vitti had previously served in MDCPS under former Superintendent Rudy Crew as a resident from Harvard’s Urban Superintendent Program, and also has direct experience turning around a MDCPS school. As a principal at Miami-Dade’s Homestead Middle School in 2007-08, he increased the school’s FCAT letter grade from a D to a B.

The initial group of ETO schools, dubbed the “Rising 19,” were selected due to their persistent low-achievement. All had a history of failing to make adequate yearly progress and were subject to heavy regulation under Florida’s differentiated accountability model. An additional seven elementary and middle underperforming feeder schools were added to ETO for the 2011-2012 school year. In addition to having low academic performance, ETO schools are on average high-need, with over 90 percent of students low-income.

The ETO effort builds upon earlier district work, when MDCPS created a similar district “carve out” improvement division called the Innovation Zone¹ in 2004. Conceived under the leadership of then-Superintendent Rudy Crew, the Zone consisted of 39 underperforming schools that were restructured in the middle of the 2004-2005 school year and provided with additional district support and resources, including dollars for an extended day, revised curricula focusing on literacy intervention and instruction, and teacher coaching and mentoring. Staff at Zone schools operated under a modified teaching contract, which allowed for voluntary transfer and a 20 percent increase in pay to allow for extended learning time.

The Innovation Zone experienced some success (individual school academic and cultural indicators did show improvement, but these improvements were not reflected in state school grades). Ultimately, however, the initiative proved too expensive to maintain. The district had only negotiated a three-year MOU with the

¹ Data and context about the Innovation Zone are drawn from a case study by Mass Insight’s School Turnaround Group, *Miami Dade County Public Schools: District-Managed Carve-Out Zone*, June 2009. (http://www.massinsight.org/publications/stg-resources/97/file/1/pubs/2010/04/20/III_MDCPS_Case_Study.pdf)

union, and when it was time to renegotiate the contract, there was insufficient support to continue paying teachers for extended time.

Despite the Zone challenges, the district still believes that turning around schools will require the creation of a separate school governance region that provides oversight and intensive supports, and the ETO is the next iteration of this theory of school improvement. MDCPS learned much from the Zone, and has incorporated many practices into its current work. Mass Insight reports: “Additional learning time, a common instructional language, and data-based decision-making are the strategies that district leadership appear to be incorporating into the district. MDCPS continues to use data-based instructional methods, using the information generated on students' progress to evaluate school weaknesses and hold teachers and schools accountable for their students' success.”²

There are a few critical differences between the Zone and ETO. The first, and perhaps most important, is governance. Unlike the current ETO, “The Zone office was never fully autonomous, like a regional district office, and in effect was forced to rely on the various district regions to fully implement decisions, especially in regards to school budgets and individual school staffing.”³ Second, as will be discussed further, the district is using certain improvement levers like more extended time and teacher incentives in a more targeted manner. For example, ETO schools receive additional resources for more time on core subjects, but teachers are not contracted for extra time across the board.

TURNAROUND PROGRAM RESULTS SO FAR

Initial results after ETO's first formal year are promising. All designated “intervention” schools have exited from the state's lowest-performing category. Official state school grades (as determined by Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test and other indicators such as attendance and graduation) have improved substantially for the “Rising 19” schools with all but four schools rising to grades “A,” “B,” and “C” (see table below.) In addition, the number of days of suspension in the 19 ETO schools was reduced by over 4,200 days (or a reduction of roughly 200 student suspension days per school). Average graduation rates have risen from 65 percent to 75 percent during the last year in the ETO high schools.

Florida School Grade	Number of Schools 2009-2010	Number of Schools 2010-2011
“A”	0	2
“B”	0	1
“C”	7	12
“D”	10	4
“F”	2	0

Results in the first year were reportedly most positive at elementary and middle levels, with greater variability and smaller gains at secondary schools. (For example, while all schools made had greater than 50 percent of lowest-level students making gains in math, only elementary and middle schools saw the same levels of success in reading.) For a summary of student improvement results, see Appendix C. The superintendent commented on this at a recent meeting with the Florida State Board of Education, saying, “If elementary

² Mass Insight Education, *Miami Dade County Public Schools: District-Managed Carve-Out Zone*.

³ Mass Insight Education, *Miami Dade County Public Schools: District-Managed Carve-Out Zone*.

schools are swift boats, high schools are major mega aircraft carriers... The rate of turn is slower and in fact, if you are to institute sustainable reform in these schools, you ought to give it more time.”⁴

Finally, despite the nascence of the effort, Miami’s ETO model is also receiving national attention. MDCPS was selected again as a Broad Finalist. President Obama praised Miami’s work in a March 2011 visit to Central High School, saying “You’re doing what I challenged states to do shortly after I took office, and that’s turning America’s lowest-performing schools around. This is something that hasn’t received as much attention as it should. But it could hardly be more important to our country.”⁵

DISTRICT PHILOSOPHY ON SCHOOL TURNAROUND

The ETO believes that it will turnaround schools by creating a team of “proven, experienced, and passionate urban educators and leaders” to provide intense support to schools, holding them accountable for results while also limiting operational obstacles to focus the work on teaching and learning.

Central to this theory of action is the creation of a fully autonomous district division that serves as the primary decision-making authority for all of its schools and has control over resources needed to provide school support. MDCPS’s theory of action also assumes a high level of centralization and standardization. Schools are required to implement common design and strategies, and are expected to work closely with ETO staff. School leaders are seen as integral to strategy execution (they each are required to develop school-based plans for providing required intervention and enrichment) as well as critical to monitoring and providing feedback for adjusting approach at the ground level. DATACOM—in which the Superintendent, Vitti, and the administrative cabinet review interim data with the ETO principals to discuss roadblocks, progress, and next steps—is a key component of ongoing adjustment and improvement.

Key District Turnaround Elements

- Tight management and oversight from autonomous district office
- Clearly articulated and standardized instructional standards, curriculum, interventions, and scheduling
- Negotiation of new Memorandum of Understanding with teachers union to allow for performance pay, teacher transfer, and more time for collaborative planning
- Increased parent engagement and involvement through advocacy centers

Vitti sees his office as the first line of turnaround management, noting that ETO “owns and facilitates everything that happens in the school[s].” As such, ETO also is responsible for results. “I am an agent of change,” notes Vitti, “[the schools’] success is my success; [the schools’] failure is my failure.”

DISTRICT TURNAROUND APPROACH

As noted, the ETO approach is focused on supporting schools by articulating a clear instructional and operational vision, providing supports for achieving that vision, and holding schools accountable for results. Accountability is seen as a tool for improving results, but coupled with a strong district-level belief that school capacity-building is a joint effort. Vitti notes, “When you're looking at low-performing schools, it's

⁴ CBS, “Board Grants Waivers For 3 Miami Low Performing Schools,” July 19, 2011

(<http://miami.cbslocal.com/2011/07/19/board-grants-waivers-for-3-miami-low-performing-schools/>)

⁵ White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks by the President at Miami Central High School in Miami, Florida,” Press release, March 4, 2011 (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-pressoffice/2011/03/04/remarks-president-miami-central-high-schoolmiami-florida>).

necessary to increase expectations, but also you need to provide assistance. You don't know what you don't know.”⁶

A visitor from the federal Education Department provides evidence that ETO’s approach to accountability is indeed about more than compliance: “For the leaders of the ETO, it’s not about ‘checking the box’ to make sure that the different School Improvement Grant (SIG) models are being implemented. Instead, the district and school leaders have created a plan that incorporates the SIG models within broader reform efforts centered on improving teaching and learning.”⁷

ETO seeks to turn around the Rising 19 schools by increasing school accountability and support in five strategic areas:

1) Improve the quality of instruction. ETO focused on improving instruction both by raising the quality of human capital in a building and by changing practice through new structures and supports. ETO has replaced many of the turnaround school principals. While full replacement of teaching staff is not necessarily a core component of district strategy at all schools (it is required under SIG statute for ETO’s ten turnaround models, where no more than 50 percent of teachers were allowed to be rehired), ETO has full control over school staffing under a negotiated Memorandum of Understanding that allows teachers within the Rising 19 to be transferred to other schools in the district at no cost. Vitti notes that changing staff has been critical to success: “We’ve replaced over 50 percent of the faculty in the last two years... It’s brought new energy and a greater willingness to go above and beyond for our kids.”⁸

Further, all staff in turnaround schools are eligible for an annual \$3,000 incentive bonus. In the first year of work, all principals and teachers received this bonus at time of assignment. This year, 50 percent of the bonus will be based on assignment in an ETO school, and 50 percent will be contingent on making targeted learning gains on the state FCAT or End of Course Exams.

ETO also decided to concentrate Teach for America corps members in its schools. ETO relies heavily on TFA recruits to staff turnaround schools (there are roughly 150 corps members in the Rising 19 schools). Vitti notes, “They are among the highest performers with a true commitment. We recruited these high achievers and paid them \$3,000 extra a year”⁹ (in the form of the incentive bonus, which they would not receive at other MDCPS schools).

In addition to these human-capital changes, ETO has standardized curricula and instructional frameworks across all schools. The Office provides all materials and maintains a lesson-study bank for online access across schools. Instructional support is provided in phases, the first of which is a review of school practices, results, and capacity. ETO works with the school leader to develop an action plan and to identify any training or professional development needs. Coaches for reading, math, and science

⁶ Ron Matus, interview with Deputy Chancellor Nikolai Vitti, June 27, 2009 (<http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/gradebook/2009/06/a-weekend-interview-about-floridas-school-accountability-with-deputy-chancellor-nikolai-vitti.html>).

⁷ Ed.gov blog post, *School Improvement Grants at Work in Miami-Dade*, <http://www.ed.gov/oese-news/school-improvement-grants-work-miami-dade>

⁸ Rich Phillips, CNN.com, “Miami school’s turnaround wins Obama’s attention,” March 4, 2011 (http://www.xydo.com/toolbar/14683883-miami_school_s_turnaround_wins_obama_s_attention).

⁹ Ibid.

provide job-embedded support to targeted teachers according to a strategic coaching cycle through collaborative-planning time, lesson study, and observational classes.

These action plans are reviewed monthly with principals and their instructional leadership teams. During these meetings, plans are modified, interim data are reviewed, and teachers are “tiered” into different levels of support and remediation. A full Instructional Review three times throughout the year drives the work and problem-solving process at the school level. Teams, including participation from the union, identify what supports from ETO might be necessary, and ETO staff work with leaders, coaches, or individual teachers as needed. At year end, ETO works with school teams to analyze school data, establish goals for the next academic year, co-develop school master schedules, and make personnel changes.

- 2) Expand instructional leadership capacity.** ETO is seeking to grow instructional leaders and is therefore investing heavily in development of coaches, assistant principals (APs), and principals. Ongoing mentoring and coaching is a major part of the ETO support process. Principals report to Vitti, and APs, while still reporting formally to their principals, also receive coaching from the ETO Instructional Specialist in their content or grade-level area.

The Office has received a grant from Project LEAD that has allowed the organization to place six leaders-in-training (three future principals and three future assistant principals) at schools throughout the network. ETO has also created and runs an Instructional Coaches Academy (iCAD), which provides ongoing training to school-based coaches (coaches sign a “compact” with the ETO office, which allows the ETO to verify their engagement as well as to evaluate their performance). ETO has also developed an assistant principal peer network that provides opportunities for APs to visit each other’s schools and engage in professional development throughout the year.

- 3) Refine student intervention/enrichment process.** ETO developed standardized remediation and enrichment protocols for use across all schools. These protocols are connected to student performance on the FCAT and benchmark assessments, and specific interventions and materials to be used are articulated for each grade level and subject area. The district has partnered with Florida International University and City Year to provide intervention tutors to schools, and also gives schools additional funds to offer before-, after-, or Saturday-school remediation programs (as deemed most effective by the school site). Additional enrichment opportunities are encouraged through placement in school-within-a-school magnet programs and career and technical education.
- 4) Expand “wraparound” services for students.** The Office coordinates and mandates a series of social and emotional supports to be provided at all schools (as appropriate to grade level), including high school Career Academies that have improved college readiness by 10 percent and expanded industry certification, AP, and dual enrollments by 20 percent; common behavior/discipline protocols; and freshman orientation classes and mentoring programs. In addition to standardizing programs, ETO has contracted with a number of support providers, including College Summit.
- 5) Increase parent involvement.** ETO has created three parent-advocacy centers across its school network. These centers host town hall meetings, coordinate the development of school-based Parent Academies and literacy nights, and seek to increase parent involvement in the PTA. Parent Academies offer programming that “bring parents more skills, knowledge, and confidence to champion their

children’s education.” In the past year, the district has doubled the number of sessions offered, and parent participants at the Academies have quadrupled to 7,825. Parents have participated in classes on a variety of topics, including graduation requirements, FCAT preparation, nutrition, and financial literacy.¹⁰

ETO is made up of 23 personnel, all of whom have previous experience as turnaround leaders or a track record of dramatically improving student achievement. Staff include Vitti, who reports directly to Superintendent Carvahlo, two executive directors (EDs), six instructional supervisors, and 12 support specialists. In addition to managing this staff and setting forth the office strategy, Vitti oversees all principals and is responsible for setting instructional vision. His two EDs serve as point people for all school operations, blocking and tackling on behalf of principals to coordinate with other district offices. Instructional and support specialists, who are divided into math, reading, and science content areas, are deployed into schools to provide coaching and training to school leadership and school-based coaches. Vitti notes, “My team lives in these schools.”

Given Vitti’s former role as director of Florida’s state school improvement programs, ETO sees state and federal accountability as a lever for change rather than a barrier to its work. MDCPS created the ETO in response to federal School Improvement Grant requirements, and has used these requirements to create conditions for change (for example, by negotiating a more flexible teacher contract for ETO schools). ETO has also aligned its requirements to the Florida Differentiated Accountability Model in order to limit compliance requirements.

SCHOOL TURNAROUND ELEMENTS

Leadership. Given the level of centralization, ETO believes that the role of school principals in this process is to be the “pure instructional leader” who translates and executes the ETO model at the school level. Principals are expected to problem-solve, develop, and inspire their staff.

Given this, turnaround school leadership teams are organized to focus principals and APs on academics. Additional capacity is provided in order to remove non-academic roles from these individuals’ plates. Each high school employs a vice principal who maintains responsibility for all school operations and works directly with ETO EDs to make sure schools receive non-academic supports. In addition, schools also employ Community Involvement Coordinators, who oversee community engagement and fundraising activities. These additional personnel allow for the leadership team, composed typically of a principal and three to four APs, to spend nearly all of their time on instruction.

ETO sees APs as future turnaround school leaders, and is therefore very interested in developing their capacity. ETO has decided to organize schools so that APs are

Turnaround School Design Non-Negotiables

- Common design, schedule, instructional/remediation standards, and assessments
- Leadership team of principal plus three to four APs (who oversee content areas and coaches), plus a VP of operations and a dean of discipline/culture
- Community involvement coordinator who oversees partnerships and fundraising
- Teacher and leader incentive bonuses
- Teachers collaboratively plan for at least 3 hours weekly with coaches or APs
- Standardized coaching cycle
- Implementation of Positive Behavior System
- Freshman transition academies and mentoring

¹⁰ Ed.gov, *Parent Academy Resources from Miami Dade County*, <http://www.ed.gov/oese-news/parent-academy-resources-miami-dade-county>

given “microcosms of control and authority,” thereby making sure that they get the opportunity to lead. ETO assigns, with principal feedback, APs to specific departments and grade levels (which allows ETO to convene them as networks throughout the year). It is expected that these APs will oversee coaching and professional development in their area, having full accountability for their teachers’ performance. Principals coach APs to monitor, evaluate, and provide additional supports as needed.

Teaching effectiveness. All ETO schools utilize common curricula, instructional frameworks and standards, and intervention models. Schools have six coaches on site (three reading, two math, and one science), who work directly with teachers to provide job-embedded professional development through lesson study and provide expert support for common planning and implementation of standardized instructional frameworks and new technologies. (Classrooms have also had technology upgrades in the form of Smartboards and student response devices.) Teachers have common planning time for three hours a week (teachers teach three to four blocks per day; one block per week is devoted to common planning in lieu of individual planning time as part of the MOU). During this time they review student data and engage in lesson study with their team’s assigned coach.

All schools implement a common “strategic coaching cycle.” Principals and APs meet with coaches weekly to share walkthrough data, coaching logs, and assessment data. The team identifies teachers for specific “tiers” of support, and develop action plans for providing the right level of support, given need. (Principals have decision-making power.) Coaches conduct a coaching cycle with those teachers and then review progress with the team. Principals and APs then evaluate progress via classroom observations and data review.

In addition to receiving targeted development, all teachers participate in a weeklong “Summer Teacher Academy” prior to the start of the year, and first-year teachers participate in Saturday professional development. (Both of these investments are part of the negotiated MOU).

Productive school culture. Expectation-setting and the creation of consistent cultural processes are central to the approach. Each school hires a dean who oversees implementation of Florida’s Positive Behavior System, a four-tier behavioral intervention system. Described as a school-wide “problem-solving model,” PBS was developed by the University of Southern Florida, which provides schools with ongoing coaching, materials, and support. PBS provides standardized protocols and processes to be implemented school-wide. Data are collected against a set of behavior metrics, and teachers refer students to a PBS team (consisting of the coordinator, a school counselor, and a number of teachers) for higher levels of intervention and support.

In addition to establishing expectations and supports for student behavior, schools are expected to raise academic expectations. ETO conducts professional development sessions with teachers and coaches on rigor and expected outcomes, and principals are tasked with developing and maintaining a focus on academic improvement. At Miami Edison High School, principal Pablo Ortiz went so far as to recruit a new custodian to the school whose job it was to make sure the school’s environment reflected the high standard of learning that the school was aiming for. This custodian has now begun to train staff at other schools on his work.¹¹

Use of time and individual attention. Secondary school reform plays a key role in school improvement through a four by four master schedule in which eight periods of 90-minute blocks alternate on A and B days. By providing two additional periods per day, schools can offer electives in career academies (Dual

¹¹ Ed.gov, *School Improvement Grants at Work in Miami-Dade*, <http://www.ed.gov/oese-news/school-improvement-grants-work-miami-dade>

Enrollment, Industry Certification, and Advanced Placement). This also allows students the opportunity to retake previously failed classes during the traditional school day, to raise their GPA, and to recover credits, thereby increasing the graduation rate. Additionally, students are able to participate in enrichment courses such as Science Research and ACT/SAT Prep, which prepare them for graduation exams and college entrance tests. This additional time is paid for through SIG grants, and ETO has elected to add a number of teachers in core subjects, which allows for lower class sizes in core subjects (closer to 15 students for intensive remediation).

Given the challenge students face as they transition to high school, ETO has prioritized individual attention and mentoring for ninth graders. School support for incoming freshmen is provided in the form of a “freshman experience” course, where they are matched with adults, or “trust counselors,” who help them develop plans to ensure that they have enough credits to graduate.¹²

Schools individualize instruction based upon data from assessments. In addition to the FCAT, ETO students are formally assessed at least five other times annually. They are given baseline tests at the start of the school year to determine placements, take three interim assessments, and take a final end-of-year assessment. All schools follow a standardized remediation approach, with students pulled out for tutoring during the day, placed into remediation blocks, and participating in before-, after-, or Saturday-school tutoring (schools receive a set tutoring budget, which they can use as they wish provided remediation targets are met).

Sample High School Bell Schedule

	Periods			
Block A	1 & 2	7:20	-	8:50
Homeroom		8:50	-	8:55
Block B	3 & 4	9:00	-	10:30
Block C	5 & 6	10:35	-	12:45
Lunch 1				
Lunch		10:35	-	11:10
Class		11:15	-	12:45
Lunch 2				
Class		10:35	-	12:05
Lunch		12:10	-	12:45
Block D	7 & 8	12:50	-	2:20
Student Dismissal 2:20 p.m. Regular Day				
Lunch 1: 100-300 wing, 200-400 wing, Portables, and Band				
Lunch 2: 500-700 wing, 600-800 wing, 900 wing, 1000 wing, 1100, and Physical Education				

¹² Ibid.

FUNDING

While support varies by school size and type, MDCPS invests roughly \$1,250 per student in differential turnaround money in ETO schools and district support. Eighty-five percent of this investment is spent directly on increasing the quality of instruction and remediation in the form of ETO staff, school-based personnel dedicated to academic improvement, training academies, tutoring, and additional time on core subjects. Remaining dollars are spent on providing operational support, parent advocacy, enrichment, and support and monitoring.

ETO work has been funded primarily through \$60 million in School Improvement Grants, which will expire in roughly three years, as well as through Title I and II federal ESEA dollars. Specific resource allocations are outlined in Appendix A.

SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT

The goal of ETO is to build school instructional capacity in schools so that district support can be released over time. Specifically, ETO schools will “sustain sustainability of academic performance by developing future administrators, instructional coaches, and lead teachers beyond the grant period through job-embedded professional development, academies, shadowing periods, and internships.” The hope is that this capacity will be built over the course of the SIG grant period (three years).

However, schools do feel that the additional resources they are currently getting are central to their success. At Miami Central Senior High, a school that moved up from an “F” rating to “C” in two years, principal Rennina Turner noted that improvement can be a double-edged sword: “We don't want to lose the resources we have because the results, of course, will decrease.”¹³ MDCPs will need to identify ways to provide ETO schools with “soft landings” should resource levels drop at the end of the SIG period.

In terms of impact on the broader district, MDCPS sees the ETO as an opportunity for innovation and model development. While it is too early to identify ways in which lessons from ETO will impact other schools, based on the fact that practices from the Innovation Zone (as discussed earlier) were adopted more broadly across the district, it is fair to assume that similar bridging will take place.

¹³ Phillips, “Miami school's turnaround wins Obama's attention.”

Profile: Miami Norland Senior High School

OVERVIEW

Luis Solano became the principal of Norland Senior High School on October 19, 2010, more than a month into the start of the school year. Despite the potential risks associated with removing a leader once classes were in session, ETO officials made the decision that the costs of keeping an underperforming principal in place were too great. School transformation would require a different kind of leader, and Solano, a high-performing assistant principal who had led interventions at another comprehensive ETO high school, was asked to step in and take the helm of the struggling school.

While dramatic change was needed, Solano's first action as principal was to learn and observe existing practices. He needed to understand the school's major pain points in order to prioritize actions. "For the first week, I just spoke to faculty, welcomed students, and watched."¹⁴ It quickly became evident that the first order of business would be to address a climate and school culture that was disruptive to learning. Solano focused on tackling basic student behavior and operational challenges, a job he saw primarily as problem-solving to execute against ETO-required systems and protocols. He focused on creating clear expectations among students and staff, and using tools like the Positive Behavioral System to standardize across the school.

"It was a messy school, where a lot of adult-centered decisions were being made," he recalls.¹⁵ His critical challenge was overcoming an institutionalized school-management style where everyone "owned a lot but nothing at the same time" (meaning, oversaw but didn't take responsibility for results).

While Solano was able to identify key areas for change, there were a number of changes that were harder to make mid-year. "I had to choose my battles," says Solano. For example, common planning periods were arranged so that teachers would plan in grade-level teams rather than departmentally. While this may have made sense at lower levels, Solano felt that teachers needed deep coaching in their content areas, and was able to rearrange schedules in the 2011-2012 school year to allow for a full period daily for departmental planning and professional development.

Given the challenge of disassembling ineffective systems without disrupting student learning, Solano made some decisions that were purely pragmatic. "On a good day, we have 50 kids late. On a bad day, we had 300." While he and his team were working to address attendance in the longer term, he moved core classes for intervention students to later periods in the day in order to address the immediate challenge associated with truancy and tardiness.

With Norland's official school grade increasing from "D" in 2009-2010 to "C" in 2010-2011, Solano feels that the real progress made thus far has been in setting up structures that will be the foundation for later success. He is looking forward to getting to start the school year with new structures in place that will better

QUICK FACTS

- **SCHOOL TYPE:** Comprehensive High School
- **GRADES:** 9-12
- **LOCATION:** Miami, FL
- **SIZE:** 1,500 students
- **DEMOGRAPHICS (2010-11):** 66 percent low-income, 94 percent African-American, 10 percent special education
- **SCHOOL DAY (2010-11):** 7 hours/day (7:20 a.m. – 2:20 p.m.)
- **AVERAGE CORE CLASS SIZE:** 25

¹⁴ Interview with Principal Luis Solano, August 9, 2011.

¹⁵ Ibid.

support student learning and intervention. He knows that the path ahead won't be easy: "This work is rewarding, but also back-breaking if you do it right."¹⁶

IMPLEMENTATION OF DISTRICT STRATEGY

The Miami strategy is heavily centralized, so Norland's school design is very similar to that of other schools. Solano sees district practices as representative of best practice, so he has no reservations about implementing the prescribed structures.

Teacher effectiveness. Providing effective coaching support is critical to Norland's improvement. Over 50 percent of staff have under five years of teaching experience. Given this, Solano sees his primary role as providing direction and support to his team of APs, who coordinate all of the coaching and intervention work in their content areas. Solano and his team engage in nine-day cycles of planning and reserve 180 minutes a week to conduct walkthroughs together.

Solano has also made it clear that he expects teachers to work hard and see results. Unfortunately, he notes, "there are a lot of poor teachers hiding out in the urban core."¹⁷ Resetting expectations for practice and constantly monitoring has been a key lever for changing staff culture and behaviors.

Social, emotional, and health supports. Incoming freshmen at Norland are placed into a school-within-a-school, the Viking Academy (named after the Norland mascot) for ninth graders. This Viking Academy is designed to ease the transition from middle school, and teachers work in teams across content areas to monitor student adaptation to high school. All freshman are required to complete at least ten hours of community service and create a portfolio project prior to promotion to tenth grade. This portfolio is focused on self-reflection (for example, students are required to write about their goals, patterns of behavior, and past experiences) as well as demonstration of academic readiness through work samples and test scores. At the end of ninth grade, students select a career pathway to pursue for their remaining high school careers. There are five pathways, ranging from teaching preparation to information technologies.

Individual attention and time on core. Norland uses an eight-class block schedule, with four blocks of two periods that alternate every other day. Average class size is roughly 25 students per class, but sizes are reduced to an average of 15 students for intervention blocks. Roughly 70 percent of Norland students require remediation, and students receive between one and three interventions per day, which are determined through teacher referral to coaches and APs, as well as through assessment scores. Content-area leads are responsible for scheduling one-on-one tutoring and small-group interventions, which are led by tutors. In addition, roughly 20 percent (or 300 out of 1,500) of students attend Saturday school.

One of the challenges of the 2010-2011 school year was that the existing master schedule didn't account for students' academic skill levels. Students were often placed into classes that made small-group and one-on-one interventions difficult. The leadership team had to rely on after- and Saturday-school and simply pushing tutors into the weakest classrooms to a greater extent than would have been ideal. Solano and his team have created a more "intervention-friendly schedule" using student assessment and baseline data to assign students to heterogeneous groupings for core classes so that instruction and intervention can be more effectively targeted to student level and need.

¹⁶ Interview with Principal Luis Solano, August 9, 2011.

¹⁷ Ibid.

The intensity of student remediation causes some concern, because student’s free or elective periods are taken up with core instruction. Further, while students can access a variety of clubs and activities, before- and after-school time are also spent tutoring. “There’s very little fun. We’re trying to solve that,” says Solano.¹⁸

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Allocation of SIG, Title I/II ESEA Funds

MDCPS School Improvement Grant Funding

Year	# Turnaround Schools	SIG Dollars
2010-11	19 schools	\$14 million
2011-12	26 schools	\$20 million
2012-13	26 schools	\$20 million
2013-14	7 schools	\$6 million

Title I & Title II District Dollars (2011-2011)

Title I (\$4.6 million)

Secondary School Reform

Class Size Reduction:

(Lowest 25 percent Reading/Math)

Title II (\$7.7 million)

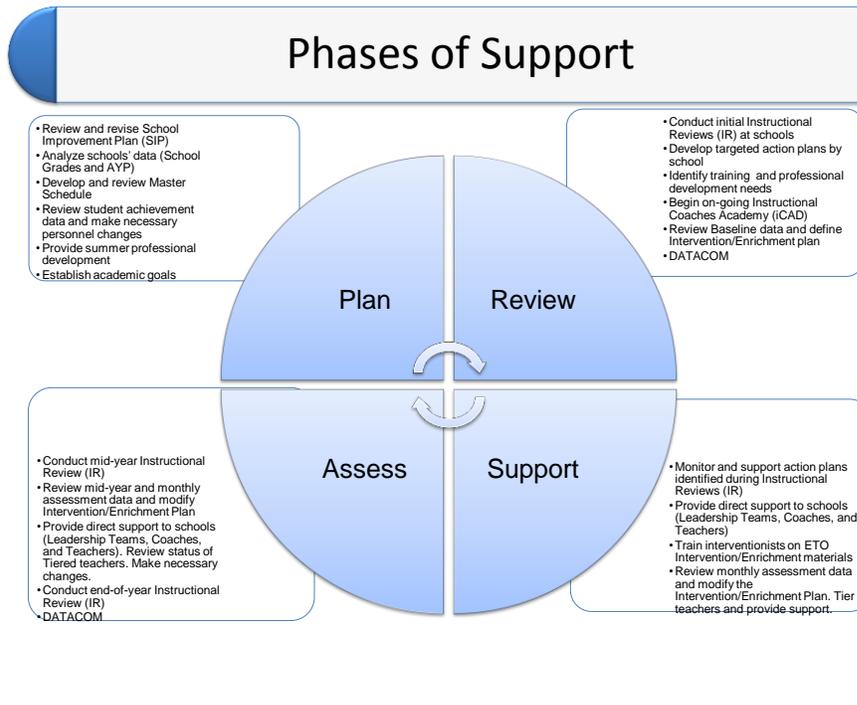
Class Reduction

Add. Instructional Coaches

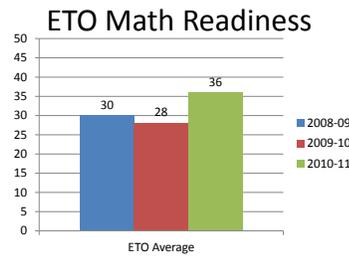
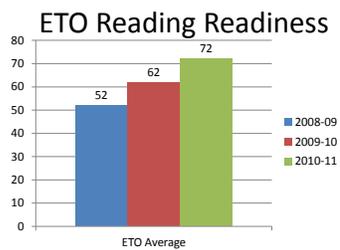
Double Science exposure

¹⁸ Ibid.

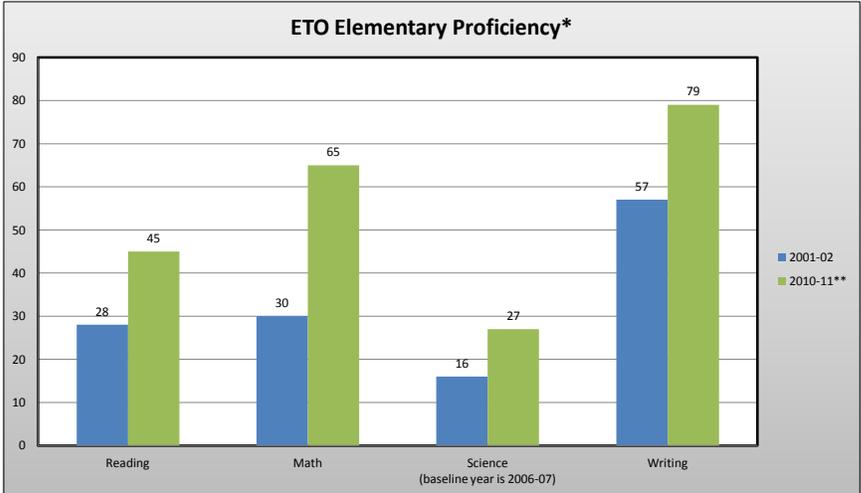
Appendix B – ETO Instructional Support Model



Appendix C: ETO Student Improvement*

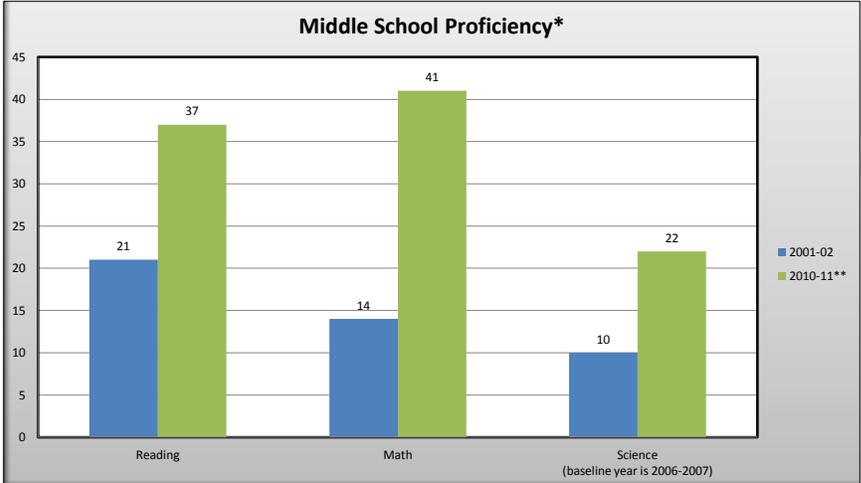


*As measured by increases in the percent of students scoring above benchmark scores on ACT, SAT, and PERT.



* ETO Elementary Schools consist of the 6 persistently lowest achieving elementary schools in the district as defined by the School Improvement Grant (SIG)

** The 2010-2011 FCAT tested students on the more rigorous Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS)



* ETO Middle Schools consist of the 3 persistently lowest achieving middle schools in the district as defined by the School Improvement Grant (SIG)

** The 2010-2011 FCAT tested students on the more rigorous Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS)