

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
JAMES F. NOTTER
SUPERINTENDENT

Telephone (754) 321-2600

Facsimile: (754) 321-2701

School Board Workshop
March 20, 2008

BRITE UPDATE

The School Board Members requested an update regarding the BRITE Project, where we are now with its implementation, and whether the School District should move forward with Wave 2.

Wave 1, Finance/Purchasing implementation has been completed. There were many lessons learned from this implementation ranging from support center teams training of staff to achieving a new mindset (culture change) of ensuring spending is within the pre-established budget levels.

The business side of the School District still needs to be aligned so that it is a better business system, which will provide the best information and check and balance practices. It takes time for an organization to absorb a new business system making sure everyone is trained and understands what is expected. The School District's consultant, KPMG, is monitoring the system and keeping everyone informed and aligned. There are always glitches to iron out when a new system comes on line. KPMG asked that the BRITE project hold focus meetings across the district, at as many schools as possible, to determine any patterns in problems with the new system, to focus on these areas, and give more support. Different levels of training are needed to accommodate all staff. Some employees like a user manual and some need hands on training.

Due to the significant culture change of the new business system, the Superintendent recommended delaying Wave 2. Wave 2 was to go live in July and would take a couple of months to iron out the glitches. The School Board Members agreed with the Superintendent to get the purchasing aspect of the new system under their belt and then move on to Wave 2. Board Members requested staff to give them an updated budget on what the delay would cost in the long run.

The Board Members agreed that everyone is working hard to make this project a success and appreciate their hard work. The School District is entering a complex area with complex solutions, which we know in the end will greatly benefit the District.

FCAT Task Force Recommendation and Benchmark Assessment Test (BAT)

Broward School Board Members want to deemphasize the FCAT frenzy. In order to move from an FCAT culture to a culture of rigorous high quality instruction based on State Standards, the School District will need to implement a systemic plan to change the instructional culture. The Board has been encouraging schools to pull back on FCAT-related activities. This year, Broward eliminated practice tests for about 57,000 students who scored well on the FCAT. The FCAT should be viewed as a final exam or to measure the degree to which students have learned.

The School Board Members requested that the FCAT Task Force Committee be created to help with this change and provide the broad representation of school based staff, district level personnel and parents. Selection of participants followed a process of contacting stakeholder

groups and securing recommendations from Principal level groups, Parent Advisories, (DAC, PTA, ESOL, ESE, Gifted), Student Advisor, Area Office and the Curriculum Department. Teachers were also selected having experience that would benefit the work of the group.

The community and School District have a concern about the emphasis placed on FCAT. There has been too much “teaching to the test” rather than sound instructional strategies that allow teachers to teach the standards based on the needs of the students in the class. Instruction should be rigorous with the emphasis on critical, creative and analytical thinking. Focus on what things really matter and what is needed for our students’ futures. The objective of the Task Force was to make recommendations for reducing accountability fear in teachers, design and recommend a school recognition system for quality learning, and teaching that emphasizes accomplishments not directly related to the FCAT. A new award, “Broward Schools of Excellence Award,” recommended for elementary to high school, would be based on, for example, attendance rate of students; administration and teachers; unique school programs designed to enhance student learning not directly tied to FCAT; increase in reading learning gains; increase in students enrolled in Algebra; increase in graduation rates; percentage of students taking AP courses; involvement of students in extra curricular activities such as athletics, band, debating teams, ROTC, student government; and identify schools that have been successful without over emphasis on FCAT preparation. A survey will be done to collect and analyze FCAT culture data. The survey will be administered to principals, teachers, students, and parents. Principals, teachers, and students will be surveyed electronically via the District’s intranet. Starting in April, parents will be able to use the Virtual Counselor to access the survey. Notification of the survey will be given through SAC, SAF and Parentlink.

Benchmark Assessment Test (BAT)

Board Members requested taking a look at BAT testing, see who is taking it, and how it is being implemented.

Prior to the 2003-04 school year schools requested a tool for the early identification of student needs pertaining to the Sunshine State Standards (SSS.) The Benchmark Assessment Test (BAT) was developed by the District to identify such needs and ensure delivery of appropriate instruction to students of all ability levels. The purpose of the BAT is to provide individual skill level data for the SSS, a prediction of grade level proficiency as measured by the FCAT and experience with format and testing conditions similar to the FCAT.

The primary benefit of the BAT is the skill level data provided for the State Standards that is being taught in the classroom. The data allow teachers to identify specific areas of strength and weaknesses for students and make informed data driven instruction decisions.

This year, in an effort to reduce the focus on standardized testing and the FCAT the decision was made to exempt from the BAT students scoring achievement level 4 or 5 on last year’s FCAT. Parents did have the opportunity to opt their children in if they felt the BAT provided valuable educational information. Following the release of 2007-08 FCAT scores staff will examine the impact of the exemption of FCAT results and determine the appropriate course for the future administration of BAT. BAT testing is also used for state reporting requirements, for example, A++.

JFN:jd