

## **Hillsborough County Public Schools**

### **Dimensions of Diversity**

The Direct Approach to Achievement (DATA) Project was initially formed to examine the leadership, policies, procedures, and practices of several inner city, high poverty schools facing challenges that prevented academic success. Hillsborough County Public School System is the eighth largest school system in the country, containing urban, suburban, and rural communities. Hillsborough County, Florida, which approximates the size of Rhode Island, includes Tampa, a large urban city, and several outlying municipalities and communities. Supporting over one million people, the county is economically and culturally diverse with over 75 different native languages spoken in the homes of students.

Newly appointed Superintendent MaryEllen ELia, began her term wanting to address the challenge of failing schools by selecting key leadership who had demonstrated academic success in other schools with diverse school populations. The purpose was to eliminate failing schools from the district by studying these low performing schools and identifying their best practices for replication across the district. The 2006-2007 school year continued a second phase of the DATA Project, targeting five schools that were struggling academically and were in inner city, high poverty settings. The effort began with the Superintendent's selection of key leadership to these schools followed by a newly formed partnership with the David C. Anchin Center, College of Education at the University of South Florida, referred to as the Tampa Bay Educational Partnership. The Anchin Center has been a leader in the development and implementation of research sponsored and funded by state, federal, foundation, and private philanthropy. Initiatives of the Center fall under three broad categories: (1) Research and Service, (2) Communications and Information Dissemination, and (3) Policy Advocacy on Behalf of Research Based Best Practices in Education.

The partnership is a natural one since both organizations sit in the same County. Hillsborough is the eighth largest school system in the nation while USF is the fifth largest School of Education in the nation. It is a new structure for the advancement of: (1) the identification of mutual research and training needs consistent with our educational missions, (2) joint action that is necessary to meet these needs, and (3) a formal and vital communication venue between Hillsborough County Public Schools and the University of South Florida.

The Anchin Center was contracted by the School District with Title I funds to conduct a process evaluation that examined leadership, policies, and practices at these schools. The intention of the DATA Project was to turn failing schools into academically achieving schools. The process evaluation was formative and captured the best practices to further inform the school system in decisions on achievement.

Documenting and critically analyzing the impact of the interventions at the DATA Schools was crucial to the continued and future endeavors within those schools and for

the district in general. Upon completion of Year One, the first cohort of schools achievement scores increased. This second phase of the DATA Project is twofold: (1) to assist in the design of select research-based protocols for replication of the best practices of the initial pilot schools, and (2) to present research and training for the five schools to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Contact: Gwendolyn Luney, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services & Federal Programs,  
Hillsborough County School District, [Gwendolyn.luney@sdhc.k12.fl.us](mailto:Gwendolyn.luney@sdhc.k12.fl.us)