



Closing the Achievement Gap

Alachua County Public Schools is committed to closing the achievement gap. That commitment is reflected in the Superintendent's Goals and Objectives for the 2017/18 academic year, which were presented and approved by the School Board in October of 2017. Goal 1 of that document is as follows:

"Raise achievement for all students, with an emphasis on closing the achievement gap."

An emphasis on reducing the achievement gap is also reflected throughout the district's Strategic Plan, which includes such outcome targets as increasing achievement and graduation rates for key subgroups, including African-American students, increasing minority enrollment in career-technical programs, etc.

Recognizing that academic, behavioral, attendance, physical, social and other issues all have an impact on student success, the district has a wide range of programs, services and personnel in place to address those issues. They include but are not limited to the following:

The Office of Education Equity and Outreach: Established in September of 2017 specifically to address the achievement gap through the development of an equity plan, professional development training, and community outreach efforts. The office has already conducted extensive training with teachers on developing culturally responsive classrooms and various equity follow-up sessions for both student and teacher groups. During the first year of implementation, the goal is to have all 2000 of the district's teachers trained by the spring of 2018. The office is currently implementing various other equity-based strategies and has made numerous presentations to local groups and met with a wide variety of parents, community leaders, members of the faith-based community and other individuals and organizations. The office is also facilitating a year-long book-study with principals, assistant principals and district-level administrators using the book by Glenn Singleton entitled *Courageous Conversations About Race—A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools.*

Family/Social Services and Early Childhood Education

- **The System of Care:** A partnership between local agencies, under the leadership of Alachua County Public Schools, which provides high quality, child centered, family focused, cost effective, community-based services to high risk youth and their families. Those agencies include, but are not limited to, the School Board of Alachua County, the NAACP, the Gainesville Police Department, the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, the Alachua County Sheriff's Department, the State Attorney's Office, the Village Counseling Center, Meridian Behavioral Health Care, The Partnership for Strong Families and the Juvenile Justice Council. Services provided include mental health counseling, crisis intervention, social service referrals and training of school staff, among others. During the 2016-17 school year, the System of Care served 215 families of children attending 14 local schools. Approximately 95% of those families were African American. It is anticipated that a total of 250 families will be served during the 2017-18 school year.

- **The Parent Academy:** Established to empower parents to improve their lives and those of their children through continuing education and other services provided at the Fearnside Family Services in northeast Gainesville and in a mobile classroom that visits neighborhoods, community events, churches, etc.
- **HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters):** Through weekly home visitation, HIPPY teaches parents of 3-5 year olds how to prepare their children for kindergarten, including critical thinking, problem solving, literacy, social and emotional development, etc.
- **Parent Emisary Program:** Matches high-needs families with a community volunteer focused on one-on-one mentoring, advocacy, parenting skills and academic success.
- **Head Start/VPK (Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program):** Alachua County Public Schools is one of just 14 school districts out of 67 in Florida that operate a HeadStart program for 3 and 4 year-olds. Head Start provides comprehensive services such as education, health, mental health, disabilities and family engagement to the county's neediest families. Currently the district offers full-day HeadStart/VPK programs for 640 children at 10 locations throughout the county.

Academic

- **Reduction of third-grade class sizes** for English Language Arts instruction in all Title 1 schools (these are schools with a higher percentage of low-income students and includes 21 of 23 local elementary schools)
- **Instructional coaches** and other support professionals in all elementary schools
- **Supplemental reading and math materials** (Florida Ready, Success for All, iStation, etc.) for Title 1 schools
- **Extended school day** to provide additional reading instruction at Lake Forest, Rawlings, Metcalfe and Idylwild elementary schools
- **Summer reading camps** for students who do not pass the FSA (Florida Standards Assessment)
- Piloting of **universal screening** all 2nd-grade students **for gifted programs** in five schools (Lake Forest, Rawlings, Metcalfe, Idylwild and Talbot) to promote diversity. This is in addition to screenings conducted at the kindergarten level at all elementary schools.
- **Incentive bonuses** for teachers to teach at three high-needs school--Lake Forest, Terwilliger and Hawthorne Middle/High School--to promote recruitment and retention
- Use of **reading portfolios** to document mastery of ELA (English Language Arts) standards by third-grade students who do not pass the reading FSA, with the goal of reducing retentions

- Check and Connect, Take Stock in Children, CHAMPS, Lunch Buddies and other **mentoring programs** pairing high-needs students with school and community volunteers
- Partnership with UF's **Lastinger Center** to provide training and other services at high needs schools
- **Black history education:** In addition to the infusion of black history in elementary, middle and high school curricula (in keeping with state standards, the district has added a new History of Africa ½-credit elective course at Eastside High School, with a second ½-credit course in African-American History to be offered in the second semester of 2017-18 school year. Additionally, the district is offering the African-American history through the eSchool, making it available to all high school students in the district.
- Implementation of **additional options for high school students to prove mastery of standards** other than the FSA so that they can graduate on time, including two opportunities to take the ACT. The district pays for the test and administers it during the school day to eliminate cost and transportation barriers for students.
- Implementation of **Edgenuity**, a rigorous and engaging credit retrieval program, to help credit-deficient students graduate on time
- **Graduation coaches** at Eastside, Gainesville and Buchholz high schools to work with students at-risk of not graduating on time
- Implementation of **Teengagement**, an intensive high school reading program
- Expansion of the **Algebra Nation** program to help students pass the Algebra class and exam required for graduation
- **Algebra 'boot camps'** during the summer
- Establishment of two **new career tech programs** at Eastside High School (digital media and health) to increase diversity in CTE (Career Technical Education)
- Collaboration with the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce and other local agencies to provide assistance to high school students and families in filling out **college and financial aid applications**
- **Identification and recruitment of potential Advanced Placement (AP) students** beginning in middle school to promote diversity
- Representatives from every middle school sent to the **College Board Florida Partnership Middle Level Colloquium** in August of 2017 for training on building a school culture of college and career readiness for all students.

Behavioral/Attendance

- **Alternative Learning Center (ALC)** provided as an alternative to suspension for middle and high school students, who receive academic instruction and support for social/emotional issues
- Hiring of a district-level **Supervisor for Supportive School Climate** to work with schools on supportive and positive school discipline; educating students in behavior expectations and developing alternatives to traditional consequences that include re-teaching expectations and appropriate behaviors
- **Behavioral resource teachers** at all elementary schools focused on addressing disciplinary issues in ways that reduce time out of class/school
- **Mental health counselors/social workers** at high-needs schools
- **Registered Behavior Technicians:** A staff member trained to analyze individual student behavior, determine the possible reasons for the behavior and develop a behavior plan tailored to the student's specific needs. Currently 17 schools have a Registered Behavior Technician
- **School Climate Transformation Project:** School-based teams made up of teachers, administrators, parents and students meet monthly to review disciplinary data (focusing particularly on disproportionality) to identify issues and develop solutions. Currently 18 schools have implemented this project, receiving training, coaching and other support, with an additional group of four scheduled to begin in the spring.
- **PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Support):** Currently implemented in 30 schools, this program involves the development of a comprehensive positive reinforcement system which focuses on teaching positive behaviors rather than simply punishing negative behaviors.
- **Sanford Harmony Program:** A project that emphasizes social/emotional learning in the classroom. The program focuses on teaching skills such as empathy for others and understanding self to help build stronger relationships between students and between students and teachers, with the ultimate goal of reducing conflicts and behavioral issues. Currently 18 schools have either a partial or full-school project in place.
- **Ongoing training for teachers and administrators** in a wide range of topics, including trauma sensitivity, disproportionate discipline, restorative justice, crisis intervention, the 'Tough Kids' Toolbox, etc., with the goals of reducing behavioral issues and promoting academic success
- **School Attendance Review Board:** Before a student's truancy case is referred to law enforcement, the student and family can attend SARB, a group that includes district staff and community representatives who work to provide prevention and intervention services to reduce truancy and keep the families out of court.

- **Attendance officers and a new Early Warning System** promoting a proactive approach to truancy issues, which includes contacting families of students who are missing school more frequently.

Additional supports

- **21st Century Learning Centers:** Free after-school program for disadvantaged students that provides academic, recreational, character education, service learning and other enrichment programs at twelve local schools
- **Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) initiative:** Through the district's Food and Nutrition Services Department, provides free breakfast and lunch to all students at schools with higher levels of needy students, regardless of income, with the goal of encouraging more students to take advantage of the meals by eliminating any distinctions between needy and non-needy students at the school. Program is currently in place at 33 schools.
- **Supper Program:** Provides free supper to students at 24 schools and four community sites
- **Summer Meals Program:** Provides free breakfast and lunch to all 0-18 year olds in schools and other sites in the community during the summer months
- **Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program:** Provides a free fresh fruit or vegetable to all students five days per week at 11 school sites, giving students at those sites the opportunity to taste and learn about healthy food options throughout the school year
- **Extended Day Snack:** Food and Nutrition Services Department supplies a snack for every child in the schools with an extended hour of instruction
- **School Nurses:** The district funds a nurse at every school to provide health-related services to students, including screenings, dispensing medications, emergency care, etc. This is particularly critical for those students without access to a regular healthcare provider
- **Community Partnerships:** The district collaborates with a wide variety of community organizations to provide additional services targeted toward disadvantaged students and families, including dental screenings, basic health care, mental health services, etc.

While not intended to be an exhaustive list, this does represent a fairly comprehensive overview of programs, services and personnel aimed at promoting the success of all students in the district, with a focus on students who typically underperform academically, including minority and economically disadvantaged students. It's important to note that individual schools also offer additional programs based on the specific needs of their student population.

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