



Collier superintendent proposes 8 goals for his first evaluation

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NAPLES — How do you measure how well a superintendent is performing his job?

That was the question Superintendent Dennis Thompson attempted to answer Tuesday. Thompson brought a draft of his goals for the 2008-09 school year to the Collier County School Board during a special board meeting. School Board members and the community will use the goals to evaluate the superintendent during his first review in August.

Board members discussed the proposed goals one by one. While board members applauded several of the goals, they also indicated that Thompson needs to take some back to the drawing board.

■ **Goal 1:** The school system will be graded an "A" as measured by the State's grading system, with no schools ranked "F."

Of all of Thompson's goals, this was the one goal that had to do with how Collier students perform on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). School grades are determined on a point system. Schools earn one point for each percentile of students who score high on the annual FCAT.

They also earn one point for each percentile of students who show learning gains in reading or math skills. Extra weight is given to improvement in reading skills among the lowest-performing readers in each school.

In 2008, three Collier schools earned an F grade by the state — Golden Gate High School; the Immokalee Community School, which is a charter school; and Immokalee High School. Although Immokalee High School received an F for the 2007-08 school year, it improved its point total from 368 to 391, just four points short of a D. Golden Gate High School fell just 11 points, and is one point short of a D.

The Collier County School District is a B district with 522 points, just three points shy of an A, according to the Florida Department of Education.

"All 50 of our schools have to improve in other areas (to get the A)," Thompson said. "That is, they have to improve in overall achievement and gains, as well as gains in the lowest quartile."

■ **Goal 2:** The mean score of English Language Learners (ELL) students in a sheltered model will be higher than those who are not in the model as measured by the Comprehensive English Language Learning Assessment (CELLA) scores.

Several schools are piloting a program this year that keeps ELL students in sheltered classrooms for a minimum of one year. Under the former program, students who performed well would be cycled out of the program and into standard classrooms after a semester.

Board Vice Chairwoman Kathleen Curatolo thought the goal was not specific enough. Thompson said the goal is to measure if the program is working.

"Any time you begin an initiative, you have to look at it to see 'Are we making a difference?'" he said.

Curatolo wondered if the district should look at individual gains of students and have the goal reflect those individual gains.

- Goal 3: At least 75 percent of high school juniors and seniors will achieve the gold, silver or bronze credential as measured by the Ready to Work Assessment.

Collier juniors and seniors are being given the Ready to Work Assessment, a program that tests and scores job skills and work habits, to help determine how ready students are for the workforce. Students can be achieve a bronze, silver or gold level. A higher level qualifies a student for a better job. Thompson said he picked 75 percent because that is Collier County's graduation rate.

Board member Julie Sprague said she liked this goal, pointing out that the test is supported by the Southwest Workforce Development Board.

- Goal 4: The percentage of first-time freshmen passing core courses (English, math) will increase by at least 10 percent from the 2007-08 school year.

Though board members said they liked this goal, they expressed a desire for the goal to be more specific.

"I want to make sure the comparison is between first-time freshmen this year and first-time freshman from 2007-08," said Sprague.

Carroll wondered if it were an increase of 10 percent of freshmen who were passing courses or if there were an increase of 10 percent in the number of courses being passed.

- Goal 5: The budget will be balanced and reflect the board's priority on student programs and services.

While board members liked that Thompson was keeping the focus on student programs and services, they did not believe that the goal should include that the budget be balanced every year as the district is required to do that by law.

- Goal 6: The strategic reserve will be no less than 2.25 percent of the district's operating budget.

The Collier County School District is required by the state to keep 2 percent of its operating budget in reserve. Thompson wants Collier County to have a higher standard of 2.25 percent to ensure that if the district has to dip into its reserve because of state cuts, it has a bigger cushion.

Curatolo again objected to the goal, saying the board had to collectively vote to make the decision to dip into reserves and she did not believe it was a good idea. She also pointed out that board policy recommended 3 percent be put back into reserve or as much as 5 percent if possible.

But Board member Steve Donovan liked the recommendation.

"That extra .25 percent keeps us from walking on the edge," he said.

- Goal 7: At least 2- percent of current principals will complete the Harvard University Principals' Institute each year.

Sprague objected to this goal, saying that it was a tool to get to what she thought should be the actual goal, which is retaining quality principals. She also questioned how the board could measure the success of that program.

"I would hope it would translate into increased student achievement," Thompson said. "It is a goal for me to get them to Harvard."

Curatolo said she sees the recruitment and retention of school leaders as critical, but said she would like to see data to measure the effectiveness.

■ Goal 8: Baseline data on communication and community outreach needs will be established through surveys of parents, staff, students and community focus groups. One-third of the district will be surveyed each year.

Thompson said he saw this goal as increasing communication with the various county schools. But Curatolo argued that the item was not a goal, but an action. She said the district could measure that the surveys had been done, but that would not indicate that the district had been communicating better with the community.

At least one member of the public was less than pleased with Thompson's overall presentation.

"I do not think these are good goals," said Klaus Peter Voss. "Do you see how vague and inadequate they are? ... I would think if you were going to come up with goals, you would talk about (adequate yearly progress), the declining graduation rate and the increased drop-out rate."

Board members asked Thompson to consider their comments, make revisions and bring them back at a later date. Board Chairwoman Pat Carroll is also going to take on the task of how the board will evaluate if the superintendent met his goals. Board members made it clear Tuesday that they want stakeholder input on the superintendent's job.

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