



Reports from SERVE Leads Districts Bay District Schools

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Bay District Schools, located in Panama City Florida, is a progressive district that has worked to implement systemic reforms addressing both high standards and quality classroom assessments within district schools. As an active member of the SERVE-Leads Consortium, Bay District has had the opportunity to partner and collaborate with other districts throughout the southeast addressing district strategies to support similar reform efforts.

Classroom Assessment

SERVE began work with Bay District in the mid 1990s focusing on professional development in the area of classroom assessment. Over the years, all teachers and administrators in the district have been trained in quality, alternative assessment strategies. SERVE also assisted Bay District in the development of research-based classroom assessment guidelines that have become a part of district policy. The Bay District Schools *Classroom Assessment Guidelines* have been piloted extensively in local schools and revised based on input from district pilot teachers.

Each Bay District teacher has been provided with a professional development resource guide to assist with implementation of the guidelines. The *Classroom Assessment Guidelines Teacher Resource Guide* provides teachers with the following resources related to classroom implementation.

- Research-based evidence supporting the guidelines
- Classroom samples of implementation collected from pilot teachers
- Self-assessment tools to assess current levels of implementation
- Independent study activities designed to promote classroom implementation
- Impact stories composed by pilot teachers

This *Teacher Resource Guide* is designed to provide teachers with a self-study approach to implementation of the guidelines. Teachers begin this process by utilizing the self-assessment continuums. These continuums or rubrics are used to determine if current classroom practice is aligned with the *Classroom Assessment Guidelines*. Based on scores from these rubrics, teachers are able to identify individual strengths and weaknesses in their current assessment program. The independent study activities are then utilized to provide job-embedded staff development designed to incorporate the guidelines directly into classroom practice. This independent study professional development strategy has proven more effective than the traditional workshop format in producing actual changes in classroom practice.

Bay District has collected local data related to the implementation of the *Classroom Assessment Guidelines*. Classroom grades collected from pilot teachers indicated that the implementation of the Guidelines was related to increased student achievement and

overall fewer student failures. The Florida Department of Education has also identified the *Classroom Assessment Guidelines* as a model program for the state and has invited district personnel to present at state conferences to share the program with other educators throughout the state.

Quality Work Initiative

In 2001, Bay District Schools partnered with SERVE to begin an exploratory study designed to investigate the quality of classroom learning opportunities. The goal of the project was to create concrete tools, processes, and instruments that were effective in examining the quality of learning opportunities afforded students in classrooms. The ultimate goal of the project was to build district capacity to raise expectations for the quality of work designed by teachers and assigned to students. The following specific goals were identified for the project.

- To promote the implementation of quality classroom practices that support student learning and achievement of state standards
- To provide stakeholders with data regarding the implementation of quality, standards-based classroom practices that can be used for planning and improvement
- To assist schools by collecting / analyzing data and in identifying strategies for improvement
- To provide professional development for teachers focusing on the development of quality, standards-based classroom practices
- To promote understanding and utilization of state standards at the district, school, and classroom levels

SERVE worked with Bay District to identify four schools in a K-12 feeder pattern that serve lower achieving students. Volunteer teachers were invited to participate within each of these schools. As school teams were formed within the district, SERVE began development of instruments designed to gather baseline data from identified school sites. A triangulated data collection system was formed using teacher artifacts, student feedback, teacher surveys, school/classroom observations, and staff interviews. Teacher artifacts included typical teacher assignments, formalized school improvement plans, school handbooks, curriculum maps, newsletters, and other relevant documents.

All baseline data were collected and analyzed during the first year of the project. The district organized the collection of teacher assignments from teachers at each school. Further evidence was collected during on-site school visits that were conducted by SERVE staff. These one-day visits were structured to collect the survey, observation, and interview data. SERVE produced descriptive reports for each school focusing on the overall quality of teacher assignments and use of state standards. The SERVE “quality assignment rubric” was used to evaluate the quality of collected teacher assignments. These evaluation reports were utilized by school teams to establish priorities for school improvement goals.



Year two of this work began with schools implementing school improvement strategies designed to address data from the SERVE baseline reports. Year two was also dedicated to professional development in the areas of quality instructional design and critical friends groups. An additional feeder pattern of schools was added to the project in year two.

Volunteer teachers from each selected school site were asked to participate in a two-day training workshop to learn strategies and procedures to implement critical friends groups. The critical friends program was selected as a strategy to address quality work in the classroom. Following the workshop, volunteer teams developed action plans and organized critical friends meetings to address the priorities in the action plan. Several volunteer teams decided to incorporate work with the Classroom Assessment Guidelines into their work with critical friends. These teams utilized the critical friends protocol design along with the independent study activities from the Teacher Resource Guide to provide a format for overall improvement in classroom practice. Evidence was collected from each team at the end of the second and third year of the project.

Bay District Schools has also instituted an administrator critical friends group with selected principals and assistant principals within the district. These administrators meet on a periodic basis to address issues and concerns related to curriculum, assessment, and instruction. Additional training will be provided for these administrators to build their capacity to start critical friends groups within their schools.

Both the critical friends and the independent study formats have proven successful in Bay District Schools. The job-embedded focus of these programs has been popular with classroom teachers and effective in supporting true integration of new strategies into current classroom practice. A recent Florida Department of Education audit of the professional development programs within Bay District also identified these strategies as exemplary. The state report cited these programs as effective examples of strategies that align with the standards identified by the National Staff Development Council for quality professional development programs.