

# EDUCATION



## 4. Education

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### A. Trends and Conditions

#### 1. Introduction

Education is one of the most important issues in the Region. It is a critical issue because it will help determine the future of our citizens and communities.

Education is a controversial topic of discussion in the communities of the Region as well as the entire nation. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act in 1994 outlined eight national education goals. These goals are similar to those outlined in Florida's Blueprint 2000, which was adopted in 1991. Blueprint 2000 and the Educate America Act are the latest attempts at educational and societal reform. These reforms are different because they include accountability, flexibility and recognition of successful results.

The attainment of these goals, however will require the participation of everyone—parents, teachers, administrators, local government officials, civic and business leaders. Commissioner of Education Frank Brogan said in a speech at the Eighth Annual Growth Management Conference, “The problems are so large, the only way to fix them is to work together.”

Florida's public school system is the fourth largest in the nation. Approximately 2.3 million students attended school in Florida in 1993-94. There are four school districts in the Treasure Coast Region: Indian River, Martin, Palm Beach and St. Lucie. Over 170,000 students are enrolled in the Region's 237 public schools. The Region's student population in the year 2000 is expected to reach 208,000 students.

**TABLE 4.1**  
COMPARISON OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT IN THE FOUR  
COUNTIES, REGION AND STATE FOR 1990 AND 1993

	Total Enrollment		Public		Private	
	1990	1993	1990	1993	1990	1993
Indian River	12,425	13,381	11,190	11,979	1,235	1,402
Martin	12,724	13,776	11,320	12,386	1,404	1,390
Palm Beach	115,255	130,124	99,666	114,922	15,589	15,202
St. Lucie	22,778	25,173	21,039	23,476	1,739	1,697
Region	163,182	182,454	143,215	162,763	19,967	19,691
State	1,973,349	2,150,504	1,775,545	1,950,241	197,804	200,263

## 2. Student Performance

**B**y improving the performance of students, the Region's economy will ultimately benefit from an enhanced and skilled workforce. The cost of students dropping out and becoming dependent on the welfare system can be quantified and compared to the cost of dropout prevention programs. Drop out prevention is less costly than programs to support those who become dependent on public welfare or turn to criminal activities.

While reform in education is not new, accountability with standards in reform is new. The national and state goals outline proficiency in specific areas at specific grades. The State's goals go even further by measuring the success or failures of individual schools.

Other measures of student performance include the number of students continuing their education after high school and the dropout rate. In the 1992-93 school year, 91,000 students graduated from Florida's high schools. Of those graduating, almost 66 percent planned to continue their education. Over 7100 students graduated from the Region's high schools and only 37 percent planned to continue their education at postsecondary schools or technical institutions. In 1993-94, the dropout rates in the Region ranged from 3.7 percent in Indian River County to 6.2 percent in St. Lucie County. The State's dropout rate was 5.6 percent in 1993-94.

## 3. Skilled Work Force

**T**here is a vital link between education and the economy. The students of today are the human capital of tomorrow.

In the past, learning a trade was enough to find and keep a job. Many of the jobs of the future will require a higher level of not only basic skills (reading, writing and mathematics), but thinking skills such as problem solving. Business and industry leaders know a well-educated labor force is needed if we are to compete in a global economy. In recognition of the global competition and the need for skilled workers, national education goals stress achievements in math and science at an international level.

The importance of education to business is evident by the many local partnerships in all of the Region's counties, to increase the quality of education in their immediate areas. In addition, cooperation between businesses and the community college systems will be necessary to meet the technological and vocational demands of the future work force. The quality of education in a community can impact major economic decisions such as corporate relocation.

#### **4. Intergovernmental Coordination**

The siting of public facilities such as schools has a powerful affect on patterns of development. The timing, pace, form and type of development, and the cost of providing services to an area are all greatly influenced by where and how schools are sited. This is why it is vitally important to have local government and school board staff and officials equally involved in school siting decisions. The level of coordination and planning between school boards and local governments varies throughout the Region. It is safe to say, however, that the coordination, planning, and decision-making process affecting school siting can be improved.

Coordination between local governments and school districts has been strengthened and emphasized in the Educational Facilities Act of 1995. The requirement for improved coordination is a recognition that the problems are too big for school districts to solve alone; that there are limited resources; and that education is a shared effort.

The tremendous growth in the Region impacts the four county school districts. For example, Palm Beach County School District experiences an annual increase of 5000 students per year. Almost 50 percent of the elementary schools in the Region are filled to over 110 percent of their design capacities. The critical need for new schools in Palm Beach County has spurred the creation of a task force spearheaded jointly by the Board of County Commissioners and the School Board. This task force is exploring levels of service and funding opportunities for the backlog and future needs.

The coordination required under the Educational Facilities Act should greatly improve the fulfillment of shared goals and objectives. A specific goal of many local governments in the Region is the continued investment, both public and private, in the coastal areas. The maintenance and revitalization of coastal schools play a key role in the efforts of local governments to revitalize areas of their communities.

#### **5. Schools, Community, and Patterns of Development**

The provision of quality schools is important to the success of a community. Perhaps no one thing in a town or neighborhood can help to establish the bonds of an authentic community between its citizens better than access to high quality public schools located in the center of or within the fabric of a neighborhood. In this regard, the children living within a community should be allowed to attend schools either in the neighborhood (that is within walking distance of their residents), or within a relatively short bus ride from those residences. It is equally important that the schools serving these children afford each of them an appropriate, high-quality education.

Currently, the Palm Beach County and St. Lucie County school districts are using student assignment plans other than strict geographic attendance zones to maintain compliance with federally mandated racial desegregation goals. This means that some students from one town or neighborhood may be bused to attend school in another town, neighborhood, or area. Although the parents of many of these students would prefer that their children not be transported outside their immediate community because of concerns over severing youthful friendships, safety, etc., many others have chosen less proximate schools because of curriculum or other offering (magnet programs, for instance) that are more appropriate to the particular educational needs of their children. However, schools that are disconnected from the urban areas they serve and school bus rides that are unreasonably long in time or distance may limit a neighborhood that is endeavoring to establish strong community bonds.

In contrast, choice programs, whether presented through district-wide magnet schools or controlled choice plan, provide parents and students with a broad range of educational options without predetermining a particular school based solely on a place of residence. Moreover, in high growth areas having varying population densities, such as the Treasure Coast Region, choice programs often provide more stability than standard geographic attendance zones, which must be redrawn each time a new school is added or demographic shifts occur. Such programs have evolved as a necessity and represent a compromise between providing quality education opportunities and responding to the Region's sprawling settlement patterns and federally mandated racial desegregation goals.

Communities value choice in education. Magnet and controlled choice student assignment plans strive to foster innovative education by affording choices from among a number of schools that are available to each family. Moreover, the importance of neighborhood schools is often recognized within these student assignment plans by proximity preference. Overall, the perception of equitable educational opportunities for all students, through choice, is considered by some to be as important to a local community as the availability of access to the most proximate school. Indeed, some studies have demonstrated that when students are given a choice to attend either the most proximate school or school outside the neighborhood, as many students choose to attend a school outside the neighborhood as choose the most proximate facility. Usually these decisions are driven by educational opportunities and programs that vary from school to school within a system that is endeavoring to afford its students a variety of educational options, and are not based on the inherent value of neighborhood schools to strengthen the structure and public realm of a community.

Over the last 40-50 years, and especially in Florida, suburban development types which foster and require wide separation of uses have prevailed. In many cases, these

suburban development types have resulted in economic, social, and even racial segregation. In nearly all cases studied, these housing developments, by their own design, evolved into large, isolated monocultures creating unnaturally large pockets of rich, poor, and middle class; black, white, and Hispanic; and old, middle age, and young people scattered across the landscape, with no relationship to one another. Schools have been sited and constructed or have evolved to accommodate these large monocultures which resulted in a similar monoculture of students. As these developments were allowed to spread further and further away from the more racially mixed urban areas, the chance for any natural balance was lost.

It can be argued that imbalances caused by sprawling low-density patterns of development were unknowingly required by our own land use plans. Only recently has this development type and land use pattern come under serious question by planning professionals and education officials as the potential root cause for a variety of ills being experienced today. As noted above, among the problems created by sprawling, low-density development is segregated housing patterns. Such patterns render far more difficult a school system's ability to maintain desegregation in student assignment.

Neighborhood schools can also play a role in local government's efforts to stabilize areas and promote a sense of community. The presence of a school in a neighborhood can increase community activity, spirit, and pride. As noted above, however, a school district may elect to seek a similar result by affording each neighborhood access to a variety of high quality educational programs, each within a reasonable distance of that neighborhood. It is not completely clear at this point on how successful this strategy will be over the long term and what affect it will have on the structure, maintenance and quality of existing neighborhoods and communities.

The Palm Beach County School District has researched the concept of school size and its relationship to learning and the associated costs of smaller versus larger. There is evidence to suggest that dropout rates, violence and school involvement and pride are directly related to the number of children in attendance (i.e., the larger the school's student population the greater the propensity for problems). There is also evidence, however, that smaller is not always or necessarily better, and nationally, the issue of smaller versus larger schools is being debated. School districts should be supported in their efforts to create and maintain smaller schools that are more proximately located to their respective student bodies when those efforts comport with sound education principals and reasonable fiscal planning. A community's most precious resource is its children, and each school district should be encouraged to maintain a broad range of options for its students including, when feasible, providing access to schools within walking distance of the neighborhood. The unquestioned benefits of a safe, intimate and supportive learning environment, however that goal is achieved, are smarter, happier and safer children.

Since education is one of the most important issues facing the Treasure Coast region, the public and private school systems are considered to be regionally significant resources. The school systems directly affect the everyday lives of Treasure Coast residents through economic development opportunities, quality of life and public investments. Each school in the region is a regionally significant resource as part of the larger system. It is at the level of the individual school where the future of the region is being molded.

## **B. Important Regional Issues**

1. Many students in the region are under prepared or unprepared for the work force of the 21st century.
2. The Treasure Coast Region falls short of the State's total percentage of students continuing their education.
3. The ever-changing economic environment requires an immediate response to the needs of business and industry.
4. Society can no longer afford the autonomous decision making of school districts and local governments.
5. Expanded joint efforts of local governments and school districts are needed to realize and actualize common goals.
6. Sense of community, patterns of development, and the cost of providing public services is affected by the location of schools.
7. Schools are being built to accommodate larger populations of students.
8. Low-density, sprawling patterns of development are reducing opportunities for establishing neighborhood schools, increasing the length and frequency of student bus trips, and increasing the costs of providing schools and student transportation.

## **C. Significant Regional Resources and Facilities-**

1. All public and private school, college and university systems.
2. All public library systems.

**D. Goals, Strategies and Policies**

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**Regional Goal 4.1**

**A more highly skilled and educated work force through improved student performance.**

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**Indicator:**

*Increase in the percentage of students in the Region continuing their education either at postsecondary colleges and universities or technical institutions.*

**Strategy 4.1.1:** Develop an educational curriculum with programs that meet the existing and future employment needs of Region.

**Strategy 4.1.2:** Develop an educational system with programs that respond to the special education and learning needs of all children.

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**Regional Goal 4.2**

**Educational programs that respond to the needs of the Region.**

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**Indicator:**

*Increase in the number of educational programs and partnerships.*

**Strategy 4.2.1:** Develop, encourage and foster cooperative partnerships between education, business and industry to address the needs of the business community in the 21st century.

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**Regional Goal 4.3**

**Improved planning, coordination and cooperation between local governments and school districts.**

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**Indicator:**

*Number of local governments with interlocal agreements with school districts.*

**Strategy 4.3.1:** Make all school siting decisions a cooperative effort between school districts and local governments.

**Strategy 4.3.2:** Local school districts in coordination and agreement with local governments should adopt level of service standards for public schools and include a financially feasible public school capital facilities program in the local government capital improvement element.

**Strategy 4.3.3:** Establish a task force within each county to facilitate the coordination of local governments and school districts.

**Strategy 4.3.4:** Implement and monitor the requirements of the Educational Facilities Act.

**Strategy 4.3.5:** Recognize and support the importance of schools in the efforts of local governments to revitalize and stabilize existing communities.

**Strategy 4.3.6:** Provide support to school districts in locating new school sites by coordinating technical assistance from local governments and other applicable, local, regional and state agencies.

**Strategy 4.3.7:** As suggested by the “Act Relating to Educational Facilities,” include educational facilities elements in local government comprehensive plans.

**Strategy 4.3.8:** Through interlocal agreements, local governments and school districts should develop procedures for siting of schools, facilitating the development review process and coordinating public investment in infrastructure.

**Strategy 4.3.9:** Support implementation of school concurrency as a means to ensure the availability of educational facilities.

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## **Regional Goal 4.4**

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### **Increased development and redevelopment of neighborhood schools.**

**Indicator:**

*Number of new schools located in existing neighborhoods.*

**Strategy 4.4.1:** Encourage patterns of development that will create new towns and neighborhoods and foster redevelopment of existing urban areas.

**Strategy 4.4.2:** Reduce the length and frequency of student bus trips by promoting the development of neighborhood schools.

**Strategy 4.4.3:** Recognize the differences between urban and suburban, and neighborhood and non-neighborhood locations and adjust school design and size requirements consistent with the scale, character, and architecture of the area.

**Strategy 4.4.4:** Restore and reopen existing neighborhood schools in urban communities of the Region when consistent with sound education principles and reasonable fiscal planning.

**Strategy 4.4.5:** Support the decentralization and reduction in size of school facilities as an option to improve the quality of the learning environment and the safety of students.

**Strategy 4.4.6:** Increase the sharing of public school recreational and building facilities with the community.

**Strategy 4.4.7:** Maintain and strengthen the role of schools in communities.