


[<< BACK TO NEWSLETTER](#)
[Submit an Article](#)

Polk County's Voluntary Public School Choice Project

Article Submitted By: Carolyn Finch

Polk County Public Schools was awarded the Voluntary Public School Choice grant to create and maintain a powerful coalition of school districts which will share resources and best practices to intensely focus on increasing choice options for all students with an emphasis on low performing, disengaged and disenfranchised secondary school students. The project includes primary partnerships between Polk, Osceola and Hillsborough Counties as well as expanded partnerships to also include Indian River, Lake, Manatee, Orange, Pasco and Sumter Counties. The project focuses on assuring academic success for students via expanded district choice options, interdistrict agreements and career academies at traditional public, choice and charter schools. Two goals were outlined in the Polk County project:



Goal 1 – Develop and refine meaningful district choice options such as NCLB choice, charter schools, and choice schools; as well as interdistrict transfers which will impact 200 traditional public, choice or charter school students while increasing the opportunities for students to move between the districts of Polk, Osceola and Hillsborough Counties. Identify and develop solutions to barriers to choice in the three primary districts as well as the six supporting districts within this proposal.

During year one, the districts worked together to hire a consultant, Marie Sneed, Hogan and Hartson, LLP, to review current practices and make recommendations to improve overall choice offerings and specifically choice offering related to NCLB choice. In addition, Polk County hosted the 2008 Summer Choice Summit on July 16-17th in Daytona Beach, FL where representatives from the nine coalition districts and other districts throughout the state came together to discuss important choice topics, such as interdistrict transfers, reaching the target choice audience, marketing and dissemination of information, and much more. Career Academy teachers and staff also attended several key career academy trainings, which they will then present to the nine coalition districts and others that choose to attend at the 2009 Summer Choice Summit.

During the second funding period of this project, each of the three districts will review their current choice offerings and district transfer policies in light of the recent Supreme Court ruling on race, NCLB requirements, particularly in the area of AYP choice, and current district policy. In addition, Polk County will create and post interactive web based training modules for the development, implementation and support of choice options such as district and interdistrict transfers, career academies, charters and other choice options to assist in serving all students with an emphasis on at-risk and underachieving students with a particular focus on minority students and those students experiencing language barriers.

The three partnering districts will assist the other six districts within this coalition, as well as any other Florida district that expresses an interest in expanding choice by presenting an update on interdistrict transfers at the coalition choice summit held annually during the period of the grant. In addition, the other six coalition districts will be sent modifications to district policy, model interdistrict transfer agreements and other relevant documentation to facilitate replication, as well as be provided with printed materials, webcasts, newsletters, videos and other marketing tools developed via this grant, in both soft and hard copy, to ensure viability of the project beyond the grant funding period.

