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Polk County's Voluntary Public School Choice Grant Update

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Polk County has been very busy during the 2008-2009 project award year for the Voluntary Public School Choice Grant. Three separate workshops were offered to the nine coalition districts participating in this grant; Polk, Hillsborough, Osceola, Indian River, Lake, Pasco, Manatee, Sumter, and Orange Counties. In January 2009, a PMI workshop was provided to district charter authorizers to learn strategies for creating accountability measures for charter schools. In April 2009, three strands were offered; 1) Middle Years Program IB training for teachers, 2) Charter Renewal training for district authorizers, and 3) Choice training for district choice administrators.



June 2009 provided coalition districts with the final workshop strands for this project year. Hosted at the TradeWinds Island Resort in St. Petersburg, FL, coalition districts attended three strands; 1) Career Academy training for district administrators, school-based administrators and teachers, 2) Choice training for district administrators, and 3) Charter Renewal training for charter authorizers. Evaluations were favorable for all three strands as attendees shared best practices related to Career Academies and Choice programs. The Charter Renewal attendees worked with representatives from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers as well as the Department of Education's Office of Independent Choice and Parental Education. On the final day, a Renewal document created over the span of the three VPSC trainings offered in January, April and June was provided to the Department of Education. This document is current going through the rule-making process.

Polk also worked with Osceola County School Board and Four Corners Charter School to purchase a bus using grant funds, which will provide transportation for Polk county students who attend Four Corners Charter School through interdistrict transfers. Transportation will be provided through the VPSC grant for the next three years. At the end of the grant, Four Corners Charter School will obtain the bus and continue to provide transportation to Polk students.

For the 2009-2010 Project Year, Polk again plans to provide several workshops for Choice programs, MYP IB teachers, Charter authorizers and Career Academy teachers and administrators. Choice administrators, principals and teachers will work together to develop scaffolding for struggling students in these high performing choice programs. MYP IB teachers from both Polk and Osceola County will attend MYP IB training to learn strategies in the classrooms and work closely through interdistrict communication that will continue in the classroom across district lines using webcams and computer technology on joint projects. Charter authorizers and school board attorneys will work with the Department of Education to develop a model charter contract, and Career Academy teachers and administrators will work together to build scheduling models and create a step-by-step guide to building a successful career academy program.

