

A GLASSER QUALITY SCHOOL LEADS TO CHOOSING EXCELLENCE

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Abstract

Tropic Isles Elementary School, in North Fort Myers, Florida began their quality journey over thirteen (13) years ago. Along the way, the faculty and staff declared as a Glasser Quality School and received a Governor's Sterling Award for state-wide role-model status. This article reviews the blended quality model (Glasser-Baldrige) implemented by the school and the increase in student achievement that resulted from its use.

Dr. William Glasser's "Quality Schools" model has had an impact on education across the United States, but nowhere more impressively than on education in Lee County, Florida. More specifically, this particular school district, the 40th largest in the U.S., serves over 85,000 students in 120 schools and has experienced more than its share of challenges. For example, Lee County is a minority-majority district, with minorities representing 52.3% of the student body. In addition, 70% of the students participate in the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program, an increase of 20% over the last five (5) years.

Thirteen years ago Tropic Isles Elementary School, a Title I school in North Fort Myers, Florida with a population of approximately 1000 students in grades Pre-K through 5, began Glasser Quality School training. At that time the school's principal, Don Bryant, laid out three (3) goals for Tropic Isles. They were:

1. To increase student achievement
2. To improve student behavior
3. To make Tropic Isles an enjoyable place to work and learn

Three years later, aided by the support of the Sanibel Kiwanis Club, the school hosted a Glasser Certification Week and celebrated the Choice Theory/Reality Therapy certification of 42 of the school's faculty and staff. Three years after that (i.e., in 2006), Dr. Glasser returned to North Fort Myers in order share in the school's declaration that it was an official "Glasser Quality School".

During the same time period, Tropic Isles was a School District of Lee County (SDLC) pilot school for Sterling Quality, Florida's version of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award program. This continuous improvement model examines organizations from a systems perspective. Seven (7) categories of Criteria have been established based upon research around the best practices of highly successful organizations. The seven (7) categories are Leadership; Strategic Planning; Customer Focus; Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management; Workforce Focus; Operations Focus (Process Management); and Results.

The awards portion of the program involves a week-long site visit from a team of experienced examiners who conduct interviews and observations in an effort to verify and clarify the organization's performance in each area of the Criteria. Organizations, regardless of sector, are analyzed through the lens of the Criteria and are provided with a feedback report which includes the strengths and opportunities for improvement noted by the examiners. A team of judges reviews each feedback report and presents the Governor's Sterling Award to organizations determined to be role models within their sector. In 2009, Tropic Isles won the coveted award.

These benchmarks of success are noteworthy, particularly when one considers the demographic information shown below as a backdrop to the successes that have followed:

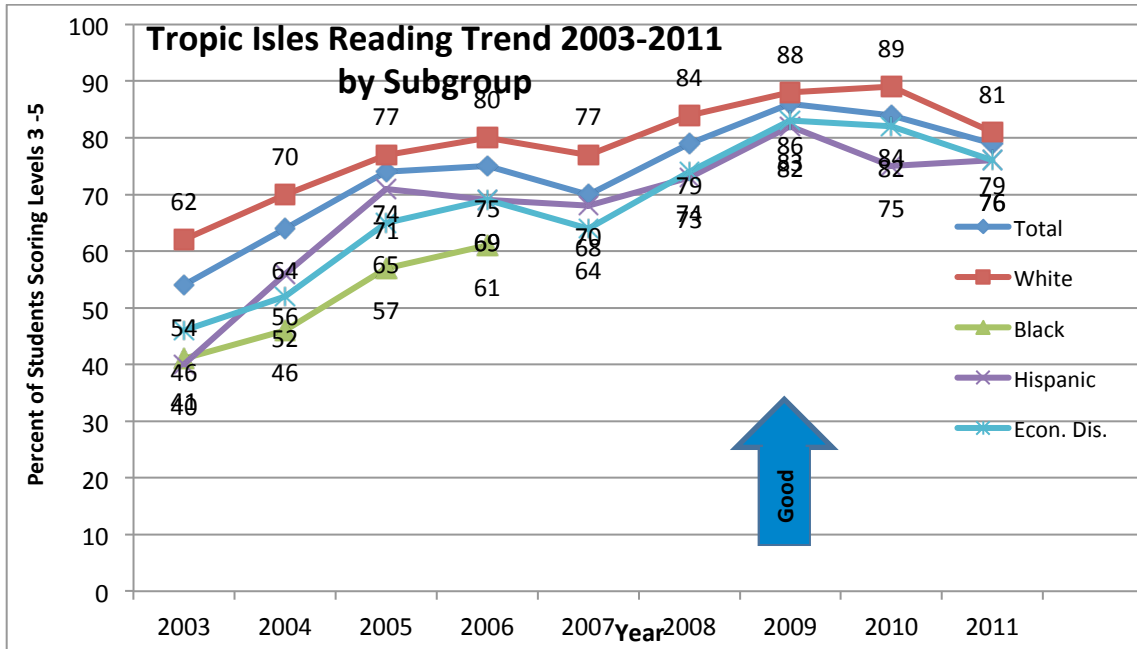
	2003-2004	2012-2013
Number of students (Pre-K-5 th grade)	Approx. 1,000	967
Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage	62%	87%
Minority Percentage	42%	44%
LEP Percentage	8%	9%
Mobility Percentage	40%	31%
Gifted Percentage	10%	12%
ESE Percentage	16%	14%

Research by LaCour and Tissington (2011), who reviewed numerous studies in an attempt to investigate the link between low family income and student achievement, found that students who lived in poverty, particularly those receiving government assistance, performed significantly more poorly than other students from middle-class families. Therefore, it would seem to be expected that, as the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch benefits increases, achievement levels should decrease. Notably, however, Tropic Isles Elementary students were able to definitively buck this trend. Despite a significant increase in the poverty level at the school (e.g., a 25% increase in those receiving free and reduced lunch benefits), the work and commitment of the Tropic Isles’ administrators, teachers, and support staff, along with the implementation of Quality School procedures, led to the ultimate realization of all three of Principal Bryant’s original goals for this school.

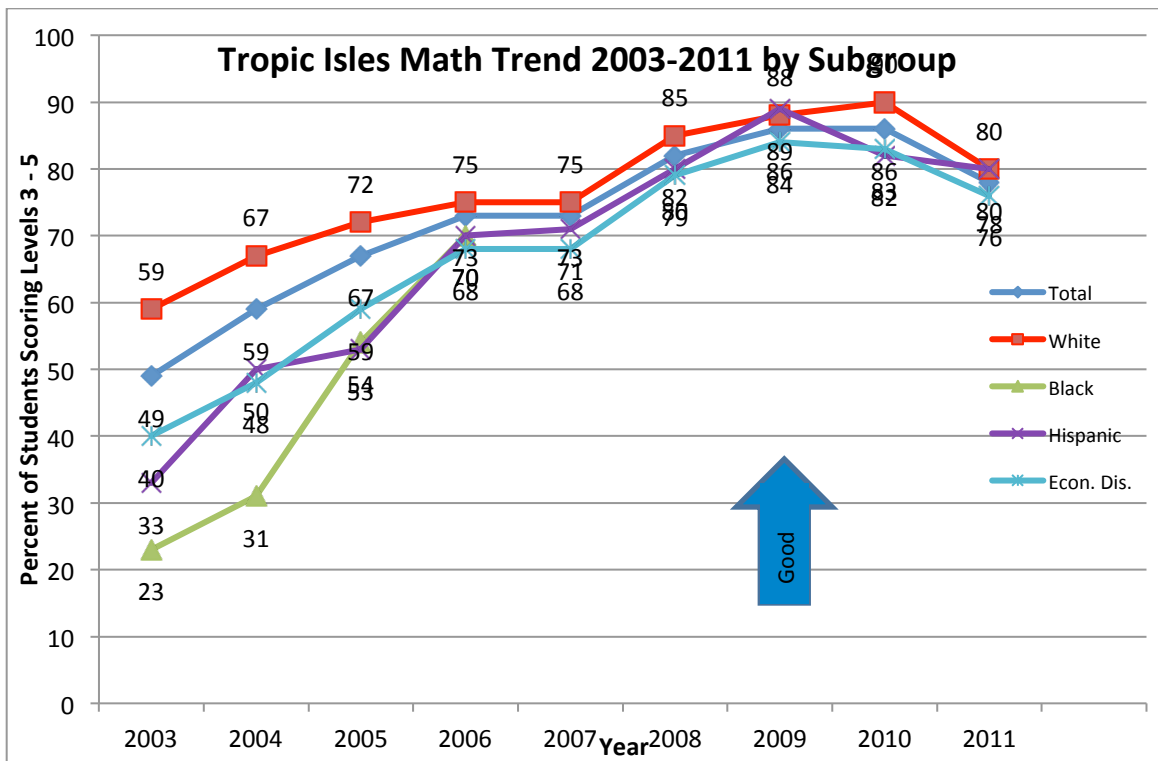
Goal #1: Increased Student Achievement

Tropic Isles improved from being a “C” rated school in 2001 to being rated as an “A” school by the state of Florida for nine consecutive years, 2004 – 2012. Other results include:

- Increased its cumulative State School Grade Points for eight consecutive years - one of only eleven out of 3012 schools in the state (.037%).
- Achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) with all student subgroups, as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act, for five consecutive years.
- Compared to 609 elementary, middle, and high schools with similar demographics in Florida,
 - placed in the top 1.8% in reading performance.
 - placed in the top 2.1% in math.
 - placed in the top 3.5% in science.
 - placed in the top 16% in writing
 - placed in the top 1.2% in total State School Grade points earned.
- Honored as a Title I Distinguished School (2009) for its academic accomplishments, including closing the achievement gap between student subgroups in both reading and math. Graphs illustrating this progress are shown below.



Note: The format of the State assessment, FCAT, was changed in 2011.



Goal 2: Improved Student Behavior

As a Glasser Quality School, Tropic Isles is committed to the elimination of discipline problems, while acknowledging that there will be occasional discipline incidents. In 2006, the school leadership determined that the school’s Refocus Room was not being used as effectively desired. The school’s discipline committee worked with the authors to refine the school’s discipline process, including defining situations to be handled in the classroom,

through the use of the questioning process, and those that required a more formal plan and would be handled through the Refocus Room. The primary focus was to maintain a positive, supportive learning environment for all students.

Student referrals to the Refocus Room decreased by 59% the following year, significantly increasing the amount of time students were in class and therefore more likely to learn.

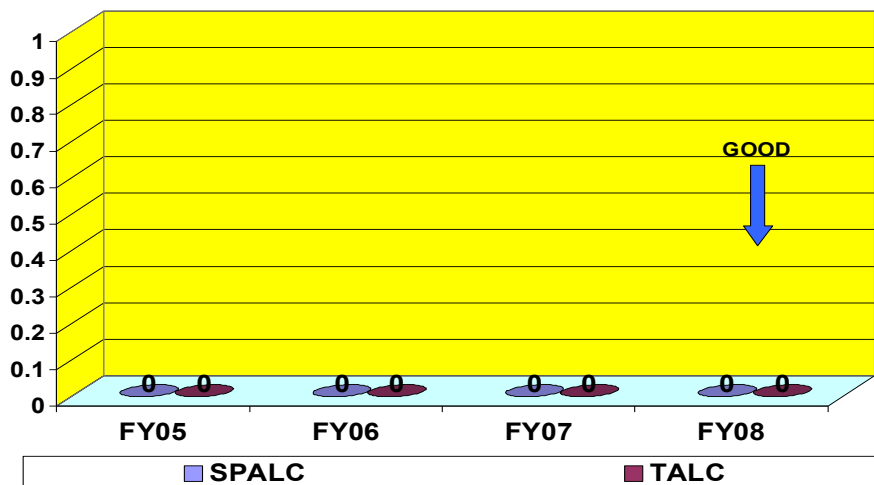
Tropic Isles continues to monitor student discipline reports, and compares favorably to other District elementary schools. For example, the school's 2011-2012 average suspensions per 100 students was 1.7, compared to the District elementary school average of 3.0 suspensions per 100 students.

Goal 3: An enjoyable place to work and learn

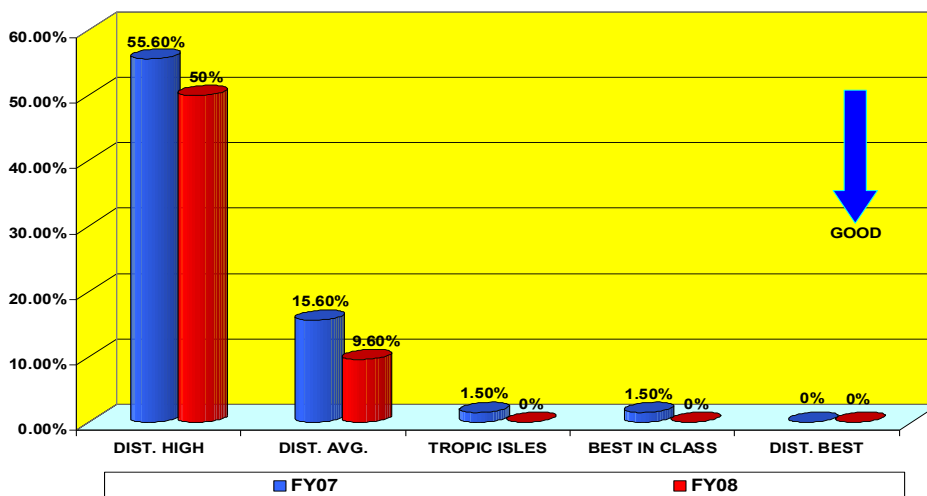
Even before beginning Glasser training, Tropic Isles had a reputation for having a culture of caring. This culture was enhanced by the implementation of Dr. Glasser's philosophy, as illustrated in the charts below.

	Fall 2007	Spring 2008	Fall 2008
I feel comfortable taking my concerns to an administrator	81%	88%	93%
I feel comfortable working with and seeking advice from my colleagues	88%	92%	95%
I feel safe at my school	94%	99%	100%

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEE GRIEVANCES



TEACHER MOBILITY

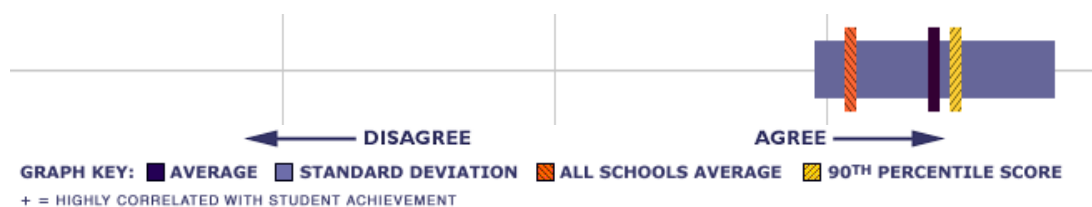


In 2006, the staff of Tropic Isles agreed upon a set of Core Values for the school. The Glasser philosophy permeates these Core Values: Listening; Supporting; Encouraging; Accepting; Respecting; Trusting; Life-Long Learning; Management by Fact; Continual Improvement; Innovation. The staff relies upon these values to maintain focus on the vision and mission of the school.

Last spring Tropic Isles participated in the KEYS (Keys to Excellence for Your School) Survey, a research-based survey developed by the National Education Association. Over 1500 schools around the country have participated in the survey. In the Collaborative Culture Report, Tropic Isles scored above the “All Schools Average” on all twelve of the indicator questions, and above the 90th percentile on six of the twelve indicator questions.

Results of the individual questions are shown below.

Indicator 1.2 Teachers, administrators and other school employees take responsibility for the achievement of challenging standards for all students.



Indicator 1.5 School district administrators support staff efforts and monitor progress toward achievement of goals.



Indicator 2.1 In a climate of non-threatening, two-way communication, school administrators and staff collaborate in problem solving.



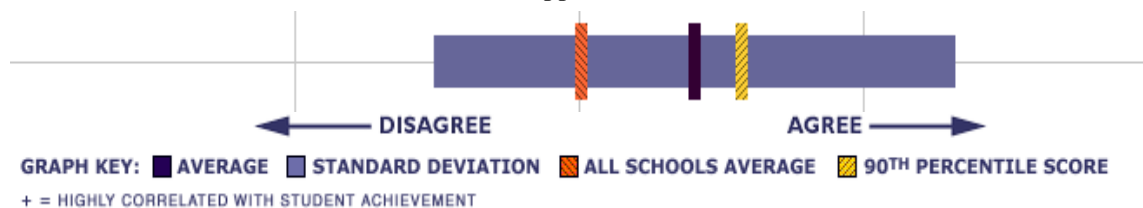
Indicator 2.3 Teachers and staff collaborate to remove barriers to student learnings.



Indicator 2.4 Teachers work closely with parents to help students learn and to improve education.



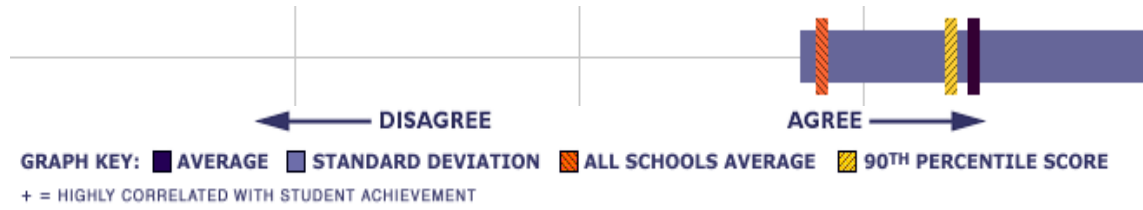
Indicator 2.5 Teachers discuss standards and approaches for curriculum and instruction.



Indicator 2.8 Parents, community, and staff other than teachers are involved in decisions about school goals.



Indicator 2.9 Teachers communicate regularly with each other about effective teaching and learning strategies.



Indicator 4.2 School administrators and staff work together to provide relevant professional development experiences.



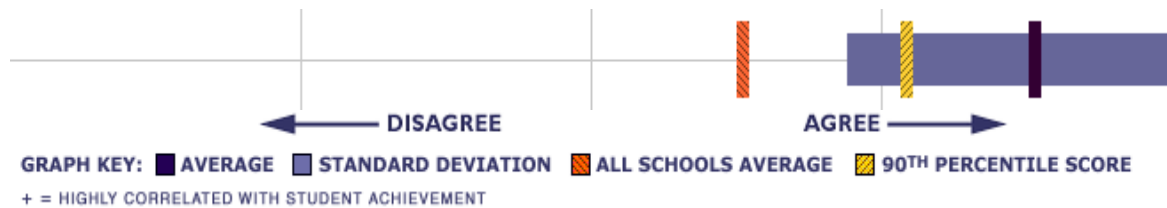
Indicator 4.4 Classroom observations and constructive feedback from teachers and principal are included in professional development.



Indicator 4.6 Teachers have regularly scheduled time to learn from one another.



Indicator 4.8 Staff development is provided in the areas of decision making and problem solving.



Implications of These Findings, Past, Present, and Future

After serving as the principal at Tropic Isles for almost twelve (12) years, Don Bryant was asked to take his leadership (and the successful Glasser-Baldrige procedures and philosophies) to one of the neediest middle schools in the district. Now entering his third year at the school, Mr. Bryant and his staff are beginning to see positive student achievement results.

Brandy Macchia, the current principal at Tropic Isles Elementary School, was the assistant principal under Mr. Bryant as well as a practicum supervisor for the William Glasser Institute. Tropic Isles continues to provide training to new staff and now has over sixty (60) staff members who use Glasser's teachings and philosophies in their work. Notably, last year, Tropic Isles became the first school to receive the Sterling Sustained Excellence Award, which is a tribute to the continued high quality work and student learning taking place at this school.

In May of 2011, the School District of Lee County was invited to apply for a National Education Association Foundation grant aimed at closing the achievement gaps between subgroups of students. The Glasser-Baldrige blend was chosen as the professional development model to be offered to teachers through this five-year, \$1.25 million grant. This initiative, dubbed *Choosing Excellence*, is delivered through a three-day, 18-hour training session. This training brings the Glasser and Baldrige continuous improvement models to the school and classroom level. Content includes building relationships with students and colleagues, the Baldrige Criteria, developing SMART goals, the PDSA process, Dr. Glasser's Questioning Process, Lead Management, Class Meetings, and a variety of quality tools. Emphasis is placed on using data to make informed instructional decisions in order to increase student learning. To maximize this process, teachers are taught to use Dr. Glasser's Questioning Process (Reality Therapy, as used in the field of education) to conduct data chats and conferences with students. Time to practice these skills is built into the training.

The grant initiative strives to replicate the success of Tropic Isles in ten (10) Lee County schools. We will continue to collect data and monitor the progress of these schools.

Reference

LaCour, M., & Tissington, L. (2011). Review: The effects of poverty on academic achievement. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 6(7), 522-527.

Bios

Cindy McClung is the Coordinator for Quality for The School District of Lee County and a Basic Instructor for WGI. She is currently the lead investigator for Closing the Gap through Choosing Excellence, a grant project funded through the National Education Association Foundation's Closing the Achievement Gaps initiative.

Bob Hoglund is the President of Bob Hoglund, Inc., and Senior Faculty of WGI, West Region Board Representative, and President-Elect for The William Glasser Institute – US Board. Bob has partnered with The School District of Lee County to provide professional development and consultation for the NEAF grant. The grant is a collaborative effort of the school district, the local teachers' association (TALC), and The Foundation for Lee County Public Schools.