

About the Finalist

Orange County Public Schools Florida

DISTRICT PROFILE

Superintendent

Barbara Jenkins, Ed.D. was appointed superintendent of Orange County Public Schools in March 2012. Jenkins grew up in Orlando and attended Orange County Public Schools. She started her career in 1983 as a teacher in the district, rising to resource teacher, assistant principal, principal and senior director of elementary education. She spent seven years as assistant superintendent for human resources in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools before returning to Orange County as chief of staff and then as deputy superintendent, where she worked closely with her predecessor, Ronald Blocker. Jenkins has a bachelor's degree in elementary education, a master's degree in education administration and supervision and a doctorate in education, all from the University of Central

Florida. She is also a graduate of The Broad Academy.

Ronald Blocker served as Orange County superintendent from 2000 until his retirement in 2012. Blocker joined the school district in 1977 as a school psychologist, rising to principal and holding a number of executive positions in the central office. He was the first black superintendent in the district's history. Blocker has a bachelor's degree in psychology, a master's degree in education and a specialist degree in education from the University of Florida. He has also had doctoral training in educational leadership from the University of Florida.

Governance

Eight-member board, seven elected by geographic region, one elected county-wide and serving as chairman. All serve staggered four-year terms.

Teachers Union

Orange County Classroom Teachers Association. Florida is a right-to-work state, so membership is voluntary.

\$1.8 billion

annual budget

\$7,965

per pupil expenditure

#10

rank among U.S. school districts (by enrollment)

187,193

students

13,084

teachers

184

schools

13%

students designated as English language learners

60%

students eligible for free or reduced-price school lunch

Student Demographics

36%

Hispanic

30%

White

27%

Black

5%

Asian

2%

Other/multi-ethnic

(reflects 2013-14 school year data)

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A greater percentage of black students reached advanced academic levels in Orange County than in other districts in Florida.

In 2013, Orange County Public Schools ranked among the top fifth of Florida districts for its share of black students in elementary, middle and high school who performed at the highest achievement levels (levels 4 and 5 on a five-point scale) on the state science assessment. For example, 16 percent of Orange County's black elementary students reached advanced academic levels in science, compared with 12 percent of black elementary students elsewhere in Florida. The district also ranked among the top fifth of Florida districts for its share of black elementary and middle school students performing at the highest achievement levels in reading.

Orange County narrowed income and ethnic achievement gaps.

The achievement gap between Hispanic students in Orange County and white students in the rest of Florida narrowed in elementary, middle and high school reading and science, and in elementary and high school math. The gap between Orange County's low-income students and higher-income students elsewhere in Florida narrowed in

elementary, middle and high school reading and math, and in elementary and middle school science.

Orange County raised achievement among low-income middle school students.

In recent years, Orange County was more successful than at least 80 percent of Florida districts at raising the percentage of low-income middle school students who performed at the highest achievement levels (4 and 5) in reading and math on state tests. For example, between 2011 and 2013, the percentage of low-income Orange County students performing at the highest achievement level rose 6 percentage points in middle school reading compared to only 1 percentage point for students in the rest of Florida.

Orange County's college-readiness has improved.

Between 2011 and 2013, participation rates and average scores on Advanced Placement exams increased for all juniors and seniors overall and notably for Hispanic juniors and seniors in Orange County. AP participation by Hispanic juniors and seniors increased 7 percentage points over this period, while passing rates increased 3 percentage points. Average scores often decrease when participation rates increase.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICES RELATED TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The district consistently assesses student learning and makes sure teachers and administrators have the right resources and supports to use data to improve instruction.

In Orange County Public Schools, every classroom decision begins with data. When teachers want to know what to reteach or how to differentiate instruction, they have a number of resources to inform their thinking, including benchmark assessments that measure student progress two to five times a year, short “testlets” that help teachers determine if students have mastered a concept, and “exit tickets” and student clickers that give teachers a down-to-the-minute sense of whether their students understand a lesson.

Alongside student assessment data, teachers can access a variety of other information that helps tailor classroom instruction based on a deeper understanding of each individual student: attendance and disciplinary records, along with demographic information like poverty status. Over time, the central database, which the district calls its Educational Data Warehouse, has expanded to include performance trends on entire classrooms and information on whether individual students pursue advanced coursework and are on the path to college readiness. Orange County Public Schools strongly encourages its students to prepare for college and steers them toward advanced coursework through leading indicators such as ninth- and 10th-grade performance on the PSAT or 11th-grade performance on the ACT. Students who score well on the PSAT are strongly encouraged to take Advanced Placement classes, for example, while high-performing middle-school students are given the SAT as a potential gateway to accelerated coursework. Overall, every student is encouraged to pursue a college-prep curriculum.

Principals, resource teachers and other campus-level instructional leaders have received training in using Orange County’s plethora of data since 2009. Trainees learn step-by-step instructions, for

example, to create reports that help teachers select students for remedial reading or math intervention groups. Teacher leaders become data “champions” and help other faculty learn to use data. As one social studies teacher says, “When I stand in front of a room of 22 kids now, I’m definitely able to zero in on things that I might have missed without all the data.”

The district supports teachers by helping them improve their skills through tailored professional development and a network of mentors and coaches.

Orange County encourages and supports its teachers in continually developing their skills. Between the 2009-2010 and 2012-2013 school years, Orange County teachers completed between 591,000 and 717,000 hours of professional training annually. That amounts to more than 200 hours per teacher—far beyond the district’s expectation of 60 hours over five years.

The demand for professional development reflects the district’s effort to successfully individualize training for each teacher. Principals and coaches help teachers choose sessions that address particular challenges each teacher faces, based on evaluation results and observation feedback. The district offers training by school level and content area, by technological expertise, online or face-to-face. Some schools tailor training to specific district-wide initiatives, such as using data or writing across the curriculum. Every teacher who learns a new skill is urged to share the lesson with colleagues.

In addition to devoted professional development, teachers have access to professional support every day through the district’s network of leader teachers, mentors for new teachers, coaches in reading, math and data, and special instructional coaches at high-poverty or underperforming schools.

The district evaluates teachers to support their growth and deliver rigorous instruction to all students.

Orange County emphasizes effective and rigorous instruction, holding teachers accountable to that standard through the Robert Marzano Framework on the Art and Science of Teaching, implemented in the district's schools in 2011.

Teachers view the framework—which emphasizes “centering instruction on high expectations for student achievement” and “demonstrating effective teacher practices”—as supportive of their professional growth, rather than punitive. Classroom evaluators help teachers improve their instructional strategies and keep the focus on observable learning outcomes for students. Carefully trained to ensure accurate and consistent ratings using Marzano's iObservation tool, evaluators offer teachers feedback after every classroom visit, whether formal or informal. During these feedback sessions, teachers discuss the parts of their lesson where students seemed to absorb the most and where they were most engaged, building on those techniques to improve instruction. Teachers also have access to an online video library of effective classroom practices, and principals recognize and reward excellent teachers, sometimes by promoting them into teacher-leader roles.

The district continues to adapt the evaluation system to evolving needs. For example, when concerns rose about classroom rigor—a focus of the district since 2009—the district developed an informal tool that rates classroom learning goals and corresponding instructional activities on their level of rigor and on how the teacher measures student performance. Classroom observations indicated rigor is now evident in nearly all Orange County schools.

The district has effective and ambitious leadership.

Superintendent Barbara Jenkins' tenure began only two years ago, but her prior experience

spearheading Orange County's strategic planning initiative made her an ideal candidate to succeed Ronald Blocker, himself a highly regarded leader.

During her tenure as Blocker's deputy, Jenkins pursued a listening tour of Orange County stakeholders and crafted a strategic plan that stressed high expectations for all schools. While Blocker pursued steady progress, Jenkins has been demanding and fast-acting in pursuing the district's vision “to be the top producer of successful students in the nation.”

For Jenkins, that meant reemphasizing rigor as the goal of classroom instruction and making sure teachers have the right tools and supports to do it. It also meant making sure the district's efforts actually work. For example, Jenkins led a district-wide overhaul after principals reported that they didn't know which reading interventions were effective—many simply tried several in the hope that something would work. After listening to principals' concerns and collecting data on the impact of the dozens of different programs used in Orange County schools, she identified which interventions produced quantifiable results for students and made sure all schools used only those programs.

“There was a whole lot that we were doing that didn't have data attached to it, and those things were removed,” says Bill Gordon, an area superintendent and former high school principal.

Jenkins' success in both setting a vision and implementing the right steps to attain that vision makes her, and the district, well-suited to adapt to challenges as they arise. When Florida changed its teacher evaluation system, for instance, Jenkins elected to adopt the model slowly, familiarize teachers with the higher expectations and win their support for the new approach.

The district's strategic plan is forward-thinking and visionary.

The district's vision “to be the top producer of successful students in the nation” is mapped out in

an ambitious and comprehensive strategic plan that was adopted in 2011 with significant stakeholder input and built on the prior 2007 plan. While many strategies remain consistent across both plans, the most recent iteration has more robust methods to evaluate the district's progress toward its goals. A "scorecard" outlines 27 key performance measures, each of which has an integrated plan for how to accomplish it. Goals have five-year targets tied to measurable achievements. For instance, the drive to create an "intense focus on student achievement" requires that within five years, the district receive an A grade from the state education department and that all schools receive a B grade or higher.

Beginning in 2013, school improvement plans explicitly aligned with district goals, though in the past, informal alignment was the norm. This year, for example, one elementary school mapped how many more students would have to become proficient in reading to work toward the district-wide target.

The district monitors progress toward its strategic goals on at least a monthly basis with color-coded posts on its website: green-shaded sections indicate progress toward a goal, white means no movement and red signifies slower-than-expected progress.

The district has a transparent and efficient budget process that protects the core vision of educating students to high levels.

Nothing is funded in Orange County without a convincing case that the funds will be used to make progress on one of the key performance indicators in the strategic plan. Conversely, potential budget cuts are weighed on the amount of savings they will yield and how adversely the reduction might affect the district's goal of educating all students at high levels.

Orange County has a clear rubric to inform budget decisions and communicates those decisions widely. Every year, the district produces a comprehensive and easy-to-understand pocket budget guide, distributed to families and other stakeholders in schools. Eye-catching visuals clearly explain expenditures. Thanks to the guide, it is widely known throughout Orange County that the district has the lowest administrative spending per student in Florida, and that it spends 80 percent of its budget on teaching, learning and counseling for students.

To supplement its budget and further support its students, the district created a philanthropic foundation in 2012-13 and enacted a philanthropic strategic plan to meet the health and education needs of students. The unusual initiative has already yielded success: In early 2013, the foundation received a \$2.65 million pledge from the Winter Park Health Foundation to support children's health and a \$1 million pledge from the Dr. Phillips Charities for career readiness.