

FAU High School:

Offering an Innovative, Intensive Dual Enrollment High School Program in 2004-05

I. Background and Rationale:

Florida Atlantic University (FAU) is one of four universities in Florida authorized to operate a developmental research school under the provisions of Section 1002.32, F.S. A.D. Henderson and his family, for whom the school is named, made the existing school building possible with a generous donation. Later donations to the FAU Foundation provide “an edge of excellence” for research and service not typical of a public, FTE-supported school, but necessary for effective, albeit non-funded research and service efforts. This may be the only Florida lab school with such resources; however it is also the only Florida lab school without a high school component.

The A. D. Henderson University School (ADHUS) currently serves approximately 500 students in grades k-8, as well as many university undergraduate and graduate students and a small group of researchers, primarily connected to FAU. The school’s student racial and gender demographics are very good and comparable to statewide figures. However, targeted recruitment and expanded sections of grades are necessary to generate a more Florida-representative student body particularly across family income and academic ability dimensions. The school has an excellent academic reputation locally because of its excellent faculty. The FAU College of Education and the Colleges of Arts and Letters, Engineering and Science use the school for controlled observations, active practicums, research, collaborative projects and intensive teaching support for undergraduate and graduate students.

Conversations are also underway with the College of Nursing and several centers to provide instructional and research support. A number of Henderson faculty serve in a dual role as school and university faculty, particularly for reading, content area methods and teacher preparation courses with the College of Education and the Music Department. Longitudinal research studies have traditionally been conducted and are currently in progress by faculty from the Psychology Department. These studies address relevant issues of bullying behaviors, gender differences and similar topics of interest to public schools. Engineering has completed the planning and been awarded a joint grant with the school to install photovoltaic panels and associated equipment to train engineers in collaboration with Florida Power and Light. In the past, the school served as a model technology development and demonstration school for the national IBM initiatives and recently contributed as a major partner in the development of the Florida Water Project.

ADHUS is structured fiscally as a separate school district and administratively retains great flexibility under the College of Education. Financially, the school struggles to meet the legislative mandates required of all schools due to economies of scale. Because it does not offer a full grades k-12 program, ADHUS is not eligible for the sparsity factor funding accorded all other small districts and the other three lab schools. The ADHUS “school district” needs to approximate an FTE enrollment of 750 students to offer the necessary programs and services to serve well the required

very diverse student population and increase research and teaching opportunities for the university. In the current state climate, such research, development and training in the southern part of the state, where most charter schools are located, could be of great assistance to policymakers, trainers and practitioners.

Programmatically, the existing ADHUS is charged and organized to innovate in terms of curriculum, instruction and assessment for all levels of students and faculty, with the exception of grades 9-12. The time has arrived for the university to gain the competitive advantage that a non-traditional, rigorous and scalable lab high school model will provide. It will support the recent consolidation of all secondary education programs into the College of Education, the statewide issues surrounding alternative certification, and the demands for reduced remediation at postsecondary admission. Additionally, in its current configuration, ADHUS cannot compete for grants available to high schools, test important state grades pre-k through 20 initiatives, or offer researchers or industry a complete k-20 longitudinal student profile.

II. Approach:

This initiative is designed around the phase in of two components over four years:

1. An innovative, rigorous curriculum for all students and,
2. An intensive, innovative dual enrollment component that aggressively makes use of existing postsecondary facilities and faculties for all appropriate students.

Florida's second educational goal for grades k-12 provides that all students be prepared to enter both postsecondary education and the workforce successfully. The expectation is that high school graduates not require remediation in reading, writing or mathematics when they enter a college or university program. Taxpayers see this as double billing for incomplete instruction in high school, parents see it as wasted high school time and postsecondary institutions see it as a dilution of their primary mission. The fact that about 50% of high school graduates from Florida's public and private schools require remediation upon entering a community college speaks volumes about secondary curriculum rigor, instructional innovation and organizational commitment. The reality of many high school graduates trapped in unemployment or low wage, low skill jobs robs the state of skilled labor as its most precious economic development resource and millions in tax revenues expended to provide social services.

At a minimum, high schools must prepare every child for the next educational level and economic self-sufficiency. So where does the model exist, how much research has been conducted and what are the conditions that would promote instructional innovation and organizational commitment? These are hard questions without easy answers, but the answers are important. The curriculum envisioned for the FAU High School would provide the components necessary for such outcomes or provide funds from those already committed by the state to provide remediation. It would employ postsecondary collaborators, business partners, multiple high stakes assessment,

community service requirements and strategic use of technologies. Ongoing external involvement for mentoring and appraisal is necessary as is teacher development. Organizational incentives would be targeted to performance. The ability of teachers to make instructional accommodations for use of time, space, grouping sizes, etc. would be protected with a focus on student performance providing accountability. The curriculum would be specific to the 19 required courses for university admission and the Bright Futures state scholarship. Major/career focus areas would be health/medical, engineering and related technologies, and computing studies, which are all high demand, high wage opportunities and articulate well with the university programs. Students would complete 24 credits, a quality senior project, multiple administrations of the college placement test or ACT/SAT beginning in the 10th grade and 100 community service /learning hours. This would assure that all students would have graduated with the curricular requirements for the state Bright Futures scholarships; their responsibilities would be focused on making the grades and test scores necessary. Some students might start the day earlier with tutorial or writing lab support to get the time necessary to master a subject, while others might take unique courses to satisfy requirements (for example two years of sign language instead of the traditional foreign language, but still acceptable for university requirements). Such innovation would be facilitated by a sizing of about 50-75 per grade in both middle school and ninth grade and growth in the elementary school from two sections per grade level to three. This resolves the class size reduction issues and allows for the funding of special services. In the middle school and ninth grade, it promotes a “teamed, integrated” organization for instruction. Potential differentiated staffing and pay plans also support teacher teaming, student performance, research opportunities and demonstration activities.

Opportunities for wider use of dual enrollment have still not been realized statewide. Barriers include parental safety concerns, articulation agreement limitations, transportation costs and joint scheduling issues. Potential opportunities for earlier and more intensive dual enrollment (leading to substantially more than 60 college credit hours upon high school graduation) are not being studied in the state but offer great opportunity for students, could ease district class size reduction issues and reduce time and duplication of public costs. Dual enrollment in community college or university career major courses would better leverage existing higher education laboratories or specialized facilities, while potentially supporting graduate assistants as lab assistants and perhaps introducing them to secondary teaching as a career. The FAU High School is uniquely positioned to begin its existence committed to increase access to dual enrollment, promote expansion of dual enrollment, leverage existing programs and facilities, and accelerate successful student exit from high school with substantial college coursework completed. Given the current class size reduction issues, this may be an underutilized portion of the overall solution, particularly for the state’s high schools. The FAU admissions director has proposed several very innovative possibilities with the new high school, which if successful could be replicated regionally or statewide. These include a ninth grade course in College Survival Skills for dual enrollment, introducing students to the university policies, library, class observations, note-taking tips, faculty expectations and safety issues.

The University might allow some advanced high school students who have finished most of their general studies courses to enroll in a course or two in their major as a recruitment tool. Some “guaranteed admission” for such students might be provided or perhaps targeted scholarships to keep some of the better students at FAU. FAU would be the first university in the state to offer a program specifically designed for high school students to complete their first two years and initiate coursework in their major. This is an appropriate advancement of the community college dual enrollment, high school diploma/AA degree at Santa Fe and Okaloosa-Walton. A primary concern of such intensive dual enrollment programs has been the absence of the “high school experience”, specifically athletics, performance groups, academic clubs and social activities. The approach proposed for the new high school, grades 9-12, does not solve these limitations for the students in the upper grades, but does address a number of them at grades 9 and 10. Junior varsity or “junior high league” will allow the students to compete in some 10 sports (boys and girls combined), yearbook/newspaper and select academic clubs/teams. Grade grouping of 60 students in ninth grade does not provide the traditional high school socialization experiences, but that is not the aim of the FAU High School program. The 15 students anticipated in grades 10, 11 and 12 would be selected on the basis of academic skills, family situation and motivations. Students needing or desiring the traditional experience would be better served in a comprehensive high school, of which there are many excellent ones regionally.

Without a high school component however, FAU lacks the low risk environment to test these larger solutions applicable across the university campuses and ultimately, statewide. The approach described above reduces the facility requirements for the proposed high school. However, over the longer term, an additional facility would be completed (August 1, 2004) to house the existing middle school and ninth grade as well as support the intensive dual enrollment high school. The existing facility could then become wholly dedicated to an elementary program, expanding the number of elementary students somewhat (one more section per grade level) and meeting the requirements of reduced class size. Without completion of the expansion, the current facility restrictions would require 70 existing students would be told not to return for the following year under proposed class size mandate.

This proposal leverages current resources and initiates a rigorous program. For example, the current school does not make full use of its facilities. Because of its small size and grade grouping restrictions, adding additional sections of existing grades in the current facility is not practical. What is practical however is the initiation of a ninth grade, sized like the current 8th grade (50-60 students). The school could also offer initially some 10 male and female sports, based on student interest and coaching availability (initially at the junior varsity level) and a variety of academic clubs, many with ties to the university. The majority of these sports are currently offered at ADHUS at the middle school level, but some strengthening of both academic and athletic activities is needed.

III. Current Status:

This high school program will be initiated in 2004-05 of a demographically representative sample of 50-60 ninth graders and 15 high-performing tenth, eleventh and twelfth graders. The tenth, eleventh and twelfth graders are the vanguards of the intensive dual enrollment program, and would take virtually all their coursework through the university. This would allow the school to refine its dual enrollment issues before serving larger numbers of demographically representative students or promoting the ideas of an intensive dual enrollment situation to other school districts in subsequent years. The first class would graduate in May of 2008.

Several requisite steps have already been taken to support the option of starting the FAU High School in the 2004-05 school year. These include the inclusion of high school FTE in the state FTE projections, meetings with university officials and the university faculty senate (academics, admissions and facilities), communications with parents regarding the potential for a ninth grade and beyond, and the approval of the Board of Trustees for the university for a high school (May 2003). The sample high school course numbers required of each student enrolled in the intensive dual enrollment have been documented and cross walked to the university common course number equivalent or ascribed to be taught as a "FAU High" regular high school course. The web-based applications for the high school and the admissions lottery programs are ready. A staffing plan is being finalized and the Pupil Progression Plan is in revision. The MIS system changes and data base training for staff are in process. Textbook reviews and ordering will begin shortly. Advertisements for teacher positions for school year 2004-05 will be released in mid-April.