

BEST PRACTICES

Best Practices is a process that takes basic financial statement data to the next level. Financial statement data can be associated with average daily membership (ADM), square footage, student assessments and other data to aid in decision making. Benchmarks can be established on a statewide basis or for a given peer group. Our goal is to make Best Practices data readily available to taxpayers, governing board members and school administrators so that they may better assess the operations of their school.

A group of volunteers formed a committee to start the process. The committee was comprised of school business managers and representatives from Associated School Boards, the Department of Education and the Department of Legislative Audit. It was a consensus of the committee to take a proactive approach in formulating data already available into a best practices format.

The raw financial data for our analysis was obtained from data on file with the Department of Education. This data originates from the FY2003 annual reports filed by each school district. Information from other databases at the Department of Education, indicating ADM and FTE, was added to provide further analysis.

The Best Practices data has been made available in an Excel format. That enables users to pull down various portions and do "sorts" to align data in a particular manner. The Excel format also enables us to provide "comments". Comments have been embedded into many of the column headings to provide users with additional insight as to what data has been included in each column. Another way to understand the source of data in a given column is to analyze the underlying Excel formulas.

Care must be taken when using Best Practices data. Hasty decisions should not be made to alter or eliminate programs merely because they rank high or low on a Best Practices scale. The ranking of your school is just the first step of analysis. Further analysis will be necessary in many cases to determine "why" your ranking is such. Your ranking could be influenced by a coding error, a coding inconsistency or the longevity of your personnel. The enclosed data analysis assumes that all schools are using a uniform chart of accounts. Local variations in coding will impact the enclosed results.

The committee feels that this is a first step in providing Best Practices data to users. Further analysis into various other aspects of school operations will be forthcoming.