

FLORIDA COMMUNITIES ASSESSMENT & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STUDY

Assessing Florida House of Representatives District 59

A Study Conducted By:

**The Institute for Research,
Evaluation & Policy Analysis**



**Tampa, Florida
2009**



Executive Summary



“The Florida Communities Assessment & Economic Development project is both a response to the enduring problems that has made District 59 one of the poorest in the state and the absence of a plan-of-action that would systematically address the District’s economic and social predicament.”

Assessing Florida House District 59

The Florida Communities Assessment & Economic Development Project (FCAED) is a comprehensive study of Florida’s House District 59 conducted by the Institute for Research, Evaluation & Policy Analysis (IREPA). District 59, like most urban environments, is complex in its structure and character. When the Florida State Legislature approved the current boundaries in 1982, district lines were redrawn in the tradition of “majority-minority” districts that gained favor in the aftermath of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In order to increase the representation of minorities in the electoral process, districts were drawn in a manner that established a critical mass of minority voters.

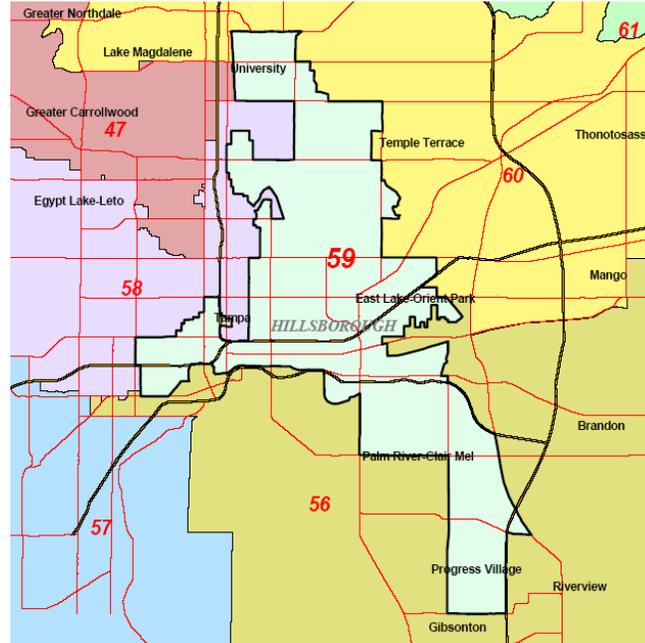
In economic terms, an implicit feature of the exercise was the notion that an increased political representation also produced the capacity for historically disenfranchised communities to utilize the political process to address conditions related to economic stresses. By the 1980s, the creation of District 59 assumed, to varying degrees, such a connection.

An overarching theme in the study was identifying the major trends, patterns, and factors that impact residents and communities in District 59. We began this assessment acknowledging the fact that District 59 has been targeted by previous generations of local and state policymakers for a variety of social programs and economic development projects.

As illustrated in Figure 2, District 59 encompasses an area of significant size and complexity. The FCAED study was primarily concerned with determining and describing the complex dynamics that, in spite of such previous efforts, continue to witness high levels of distress in the District. At the same time, preliminary signals suggested that the levels of distress in District 59 outweighed positive gains from redevelopment efforts in the District.

Despite the implementation of a range of economic development projects, many communities in District 59 have faced increasing economic hardship. A picture is emerging where communities that comprise District 59 seemed to have been bypassed by the economic activity occurring in various locations. Indeed, District 59 might be defined by the coexistence of pockets of economic redevelopment and revitalization situated alongside distressed and decaying communities.

FIGURE 2: DISTRICT 59 BOUNDARIES



The Project

District 59 has come to be defined by a network of communities and neighborhoods that reflect a diverse range of economic, social and demographic patterns. The FCAED study was particularly concerned with exploring confluence of both the demographic realities and the economic characteristics that make District 59 a unique case study. The broad goals of the full FCAED project were to:

1. Assess the significant demographic, economic conditions that have affected the District over a span of 20 years.
2. Outline best practices for stimulating the economic growth and development of District 59.
3. Construct a comprehensive plan-of-action for stimulating district-wide development.
4. Create a model for economic development that can be duplicated in similar districts across the State of Florida.

The study identified the urgent conditions and unique trends that exist in District 59 and that consequently confront residents, communities, and businesses. The specific focus was on 1) measuring an array of indicators that comprise seven (7) major policy areas in order to assess the conditions of the District, and 2) developing strategies for District-wide development in a manner consistent with

its geographical and socio-economic complexities. The main objective of the research was to assess the state of the District through an analysis of baseline data and quality-of-life indicators in District 59. Specifically, this assessment phase of the research addressed the following question:

What are the significant social, economic and quality-of-life conditions and trends that currently impact the development of District 59?

In exploring answers to this concern, the FCAED project focused on the following tasks:

- ✦ Collect baseline data on socio-demographic, socio-economic measures in District 59.
- ✦ Collect baseline data on quality-of-life in District 59.
- ✦ Design and facilitate District 59 Community Participation forums.
- ✦ Develop and administer a survey instrument for a qualitative assessment of District 59 resident perceptions, views, and concerns.
- ✦ Initiate the development of a technology-based platform that makes research data and findings available for citizens, governments, and other public/private entities.
- ✦ Coordinate the development of capacity-building initiatives including resource development, strategic partnerships, and grant research.

The study focused on the following policy areas:

- ✦ Crime
- ✦ Education
- ✦ Employment / Jobs
- ✦ Health
- ✦ Housing
- ✦ Population
- ✦ Poverty

Finally, in addition to assessing the District, the project was fully concerned with presenting a set of recommendations to the public in order to stimulate strategies and solutions. Thus, we conclude with the following summary of the study's findings and recommendations.

FCAED Study Recommendations

It is against this backdrop that the FCAED assessed the significant dynamics effecting District 59. From the assessment, we offered suggestions based on five (5) of the seven policy areas including crime, education, employment/jobs,

health, and housing. In order to establish a contextual backdrop, the study provided perspective using background data for two additional variables including population and poverty. The study indicated significant diversity of factors across the three sectors of the District as it relates to the five main policy areas. The following recommendations are based on those findings.

Crime

1. **Crime prevention summit.** Federal, state and municipal policymakers; local elected officials; local law enforcement representatives; community leaders; and residents should convene a crime prevention summit specifically dedicated to plotting a strategic plan to reduce areas of persistent crime in District 59 communities. Existing anti-crime programs such as those implemented in the University Area should serve as a blueprint for guiding summit strategies in other District 59 communities that were identified in the FCAED assessment as High Crime Communities.

Recommended community targets: East Tampa, University Area, and Palm River.

2. **Youth organization task force.** A District 59 youth organization task force should be commissioned for the sole purpose of identifying existing youth-based organizations operating in District 59 communities, facilitating collaborations and cooperation between those existing organizations, and providing assistance for the creation of new youth organizations where necessary. The task force should emphasize the promotion of crime prevention themes and activities in the categories identified in the FCAED findings.

Recommended policy target: The youth crime prevention task force should place its initial focus on criminal activity associated with drug-related criminal activity, motor vehicle thefts, burglary, and gang activity.

3. **Crime reduction assessment.** Existing crime prevention partnerships and collaborative programs between the Tampa Police Department, the Hillsborough County Sheriffs Office, and citizens should be asked to report on the impact of their community-based practices implemented specifically in District 59 communities. Insights should focus on identifying effective collaborative strategies used by local law enforcement and residents to reduce crime and the challenges they have encountered.

Recommended community target: Community policing and neighborhood watch programs.

Education

4. **Instructional strategies panel.** Representatives from each of the public high schools serving District 59 students should collaborate on the creation of a best practices agenda for high school instruction. The product of this collaboration should highlight the unique instructional policies that have been successfully implemented in specific District 59 high schools as well as the various federal, state, and community-based approaches that representatives have adopted.

Recommended community targets: Initial focus on instructional strategies implemented at Middleton High School and Blake High School.

5. **Specialized in-service training.** Teachers at District 59 elementary, middle, and high schools should be provided with access to in-service training opportunities specifically designed to address the unique challenges experienced by teachers, students, and parent in District 59 communities and schools. This will require the development of specially tailored programs that have proven to be effective by educational policymakers, District 59 administrators, and teachers for improving instruction for students residing in communities like those in District 59.

Our recommended target: A survey of District 59 teachers should be initiated in order to identify the most requested in-service programs.

Employment/Jobs

6. **Job creation pilot program.** An employment program should be piloted in District 59 that targets the high levels of unemployment (and unemployability). The pilot program should be designed with the goal of contributing to the broader economic development of District 59 by providing employment opportunities for residents. Specifically, the program should be administered through a partnership between local employment agencies, policymakers, businesses, and residents. Given the current foreclosure challenges facing the District, the pilot program should provide employment opportunities for residents for the purpose of renovating, yard up-keep, and the general maintenance of foreclosed properties located in District 59.

Recommended community targets: East Tampa and Progress Village.

7. **Small business development:** Given the importance of the Tampa Bay region and the “Interstate 4 Corridor” to Florida’s expanding health, medical and aerospace technology industries, state officials should join with policymakers representing the City of Tampa and Hillsborough County in an effort to meet the employment demands that will emerge as

a result. The State of Florida has emphasized industry clusters in these fields as a priority in statewide economic development and job creation. Accordingly, District 59 could incur significant benefits if residents were provided with opportunities for improving job skills that will allow them to access employment related to the emerging industry clusters located in the region.

Recommended policy target: District 59 residents in communities with high unemployment rates should have access to opportunities for small business and micro business development in order to provide services to industry cluster firms.

Health

- 8. HIV/AIDS prevention legislation.** While there are significant concerns regarding the health of District 59 residents in a number of categories, the problem of HIV/AIDS was a poignant part of the FCAED findings. Given the relatively high number of HIV/AIDS-related deaths in the District, and in light of the increased campaigns to improve awareness and treatment of the disease at the federal, state, and local levels, there must be an immediate review and evaluation of health-related programs implemented in Hillsborough County for the purpose of combating HIV/AIDS. Particular emphasis must be placed on programs and facilities located in District 59 communities and that serve District 59 residents.

Recommended policy targets: A critical component of the review should be the creation of a legislative strategy specifically designed to address the disproportionate impact of the disease in District 59 communities.

- 9. Healthcare specialist enticement program.** Residents in District 59 communities have significantly lower access to healthcare facilities and professionals compared to other Hillsborough County residents. As a result, a healthcare enticement program that focuses on increasing the number of physicians and facilities practicing in District 59 communities should be implemented. The enticement program should use a combination of strategic partnerships in the field to identify and attract budding physicians and healthcare specialists to practice in distressed communities in District 59. In addition to partnerships, the enticement program should include a strategy to explore existing grant opportunities at the federal and state levels in order to sustain the program. The program should help facilitate the recruitment and sustaining of physicians and other healthcare professionals in three (3) District 59 communities that demonstrated high levels of health-related problems along side low access to healthcare facilities and professionals.

Recommended community targets: East Tampa, Palm River, and West Tampa.

Housing

10. **Foreclosure emergency fund.** Specifically, state and local housing officials should create a foreclosure emergency fund that combines existing programs and newly available monies from federal and state sources that, among other provisions, will assist qualifying District 59 homeowners in adjusting mortgage terms in order to prevent additional foreclosures. The fund should initially concentrate on preventing foreclosures in the central sector of the District where the communities with the highest foreclosure rates were identified in the study.

Recommended community targets: East Tampa, Northeast Community.

11. **Housing rehabilitation program.** A long-term program must be developed that focuses on the improvement of the housing stock in District 59 communities. The program should utilize existing funds in order to assist homeowners in improving the condition of houses, yards, and lots. Funds should be provided for improvement projects that include painting, home repairs, debris removal, and residential code violations. The fund should initially concentrate on improving the housing stock in District 59 communities with low property values.

Recommended community targets: Ybor City, Southeast Tampa, and University Area.

12. **Homebuyer assistance programs.** The FCAED study revealed concentrations of high-level renter and low-level homeowner communities in District 59. We recommend existing homebuyer assistance programs be targeted to help qualified renters in communities with such “high-low” combinations become homeowners. District 59 residents should gain information on and access to programs including but not limited to first-time homebuyer, rent-to-own assistance, and down payment assistance.

Recommended community targets: University Area, West Tampa, Temple Crest.