IT'S BROKEN. FIX IT. NOW.

Melrose Elementary: 34%; The state standard: 79%; Outraged by low reading scores at 20 elementary schools, 38 Pinellas congregations want 3,000 members to gather Monday to demand action from school officials. Their message:

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Ramona Denmark remembers how she felt when her son's teacher told her he needed to be retained in the first grade.

He wasn't reading as he needed to be reading, they told her. He needed one more year.

"It was like a shocker for me," said Denmark, whose older daughter had excelled at the same school years before.

Now, Ramona Denmark and her mother are part of a vocal group pressuring Pinellas County educators to improve reading instruction in struggling public schools.

Members of Faith and Action for Strength Together, or FAST, an alliance of 38 churches, synagogues and mosques, think a teaching method crucial in improving reading skills among the Pinellas County School District's poorest and poorest performing kids.

So far, they've met with little support.

"I have real issues with pushing programs on schools," said board member Janet Clark, a former teacher who said she has used direct instruc

As promoted by the National Institute for Direct Instruction in Eugene, Ore., the concept revolves around highly prescribed lessons and intens master concepts as they go.

FAST is calling on superintendent John Stewart and the School Board members to pilot the instructional method as part of the core curriculum horrendously," said the Rev. Robert Ward, pastor of Mount Moriah Baptist Church in St. Petersburg.

The schools were chosen both for their students' FCAT reading scores and because they are in communities where their members live, he sa percentages of minority students and those who get a free or reduced-price lunch.

"Too many children in our county cannot read," Ward said.

In 2011, the state Department of Education set a standard requiring Florida schools to have 79 percent of their students in each subgroup pro 74 percent.

A 2011 national study of 4,000 students over time found that students who don't read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to le proficient readers.