

V. SUMMARY

A Curriculum Audit™ is basically an “exception” report. That is, it does not give a summative, overall view of the suitability of a system. Rather, it holds the system up to scrutiny against the predetermined standards of quality, notes relevant findings about the system, and cites discrepancies from audit standards. Recommendations are then provided accordingly to help the district improve its quality in the areas of noted deficiency.

The auditors subjected the Kenosha Unified School District to a comparison of predetermined standards and indicators of quality, and discrepancies were noted. These constitute the findings of the audit. The auditors then provided recommendations to help the district ameliorate the discrepancies noted in the report. The recommendations represent the auditors’ “best judgment” about how to meet the discrepancies disclosed in the report. It is expected that the superintendent, her staff, and the board may demur with the recommendations. However, they form the starting point for a discussion of how to deal with the documented findings.

Normal audit practice is the board of education *receives* an audit, they do not *accept* it. After review of the audit report, the board requests the response of its superintendent. When the superintendent’s response is received, then the board is in a position to act upon those two sets of recommendations. In this manner, the superintendent and the board are always accountable for what occurs in the school system after an audit report.

Located along the shores of Lake Michigan, midway between Chicago and Milwaukee, the Kenosha Unified School District is the third largest district in the state of Wisconsin, serving more than 22,000 students. Over the past two decades, as the population in the Kenosha area increased, so has the racial and economic diversity, which is reflected in the makeup of students attending Kenosha schools. Nearly half of the student body has identified themselves as other than White, and over half of all students are considered economically disadvantaged. With the changes in student population, the Kenosha Unified School District is confronted with many of the challenges typically associated with poverty, including disparities in academic achievement, discipline referrals, suspension rates, access to advanced programs, expectations for student success, and the application of effective instructional strategies.

Expectations and demands placed on public schools both at the state and national level are constantly changing. Over the of the past three years, the Kenosha Unified School District has confronted several new realities simultaneously, including changes in state academic content standards, higher expectations for student achievement, decreases in state education funding, and changes in state collective bargaining laws that significantly changed longstanding employer-employee relationships. While legislatures may change state education policy, ultimately local school boards are responsible for effectively implementing state laws and managing the affairs of the school district. When school boards have in place a comprehensive framework of governance policies that support effective planning and decision making, the district will benefit from the board’s forward thinking and proactive leadership. However, when there is a lack of clarity regarding the roles of governance and management, and a lack of organizational structures focused around the mission of teaching and learning, school districts run the risk of failing to serve the needs of their students.

In order for school boards and district administrators to meet increasing expectations and demands for improved student learning, they need to be consistently engaged in short- and long-range planning. Planning in the Kenosha Unified School District for critical functions such as curriculum development, professional development, student and program assessment, and school improvement has not been coordinated into a unifying effort that focuses on attainment of district goals. The Transformation Plan articulates a vision and core values for the school district but lacks sufficient clarity to communicate what the transformational principles should look like when fully realized. The lack of clarity, and the lack of research links to best practices within the Transformation Plan, have permitted multiple interpretations of the transformational principles to evolve. While planning is taking place in the district, it is not of sufficient quality and has not been coordinated into one cohesive set of actions capable of focusing the efforts of district staff and the allocation of district resources toward increasing student achievement.

The ability to address academic diversity in the classroom and promote high expectations for all students is an important challenge confronted by school districts and teachers across the country. Accountability

measures, as currently required at the state and federal levels, increase the importance of having in place a well-documented curriculum management and student assessment plan. Without comprehensive curriculum guides in place that clearly delineate desired learning outcomes, suggested instructional strategies, and appropriate evaluation methods that are implemented consistently district-wide, the learning experience of students can become fragmented. Without a comprehensive curriculum management system in place, student achievement as measured by required assessments becomes less an outcome of the curriculum taught and more a factor of the students' background and prior experiences. The Kenosha Unified School District lacks a cohesive approach to the design, development, implementation, and monitoring of the district curriculum. The scope of the written curriculum is inadequate at all levels and for all content areas. The quality of district curriculum documents is also inadequate to direct teaching and provide a rigorous educational program for student achievement. Multiple efforts to develop curriculum exist across the district but are isolated at individual school sites and are not sufficiently coordinated district-wide to establish and bring focus to the instructional work, resulting in multiple interpretations regarding student learning.

To meet the varied needs of all students, the teacher's role is to determine the learning sequence, pacing, and instructional strategies necessary to ensure all students achieve mastery of meaningful content standards. Sustained implementation of teaching strategies that have the potential of increasing student achievement requires ongoing professional development for all staff who affect student learning. Training focused on instructional strategies and deepening teacher content knowledge makes it possible for teachers to move their students to deeper understanding of the content. Well-designed professional development programs support adult learning by using a variety of training approaches, including job-embedded learning and professional coaching with constructive feedback. The design of the Kenosha Unified School District's professional development program is determined primarily by individual school sites, resulting in the lack of sufficient focus or coordination to inform instructional practices district-wide. A comprehensive professional development plan is not in place to prevent a fragmented approach to professional learning. There is no process in place to ensure professional development is driven by disaggregated student achievement data, student achievement goals, district priorities, or organizational needs. No indication was found that the district's professional development programs have increased the number of students demonstrating proficiency on the state knowledge and concepts examination.

A comprehensive student and program assessment system is critical to informing district decision making. Utilizing a variety of formative and summative assessment approaches, a comprehensive assessment program provides district decision-makers timely feedback specific to the progress students are making toward clearly defined learning outcomes. An assessment program that does not provide adequate coverage of the taught curriculum limits the ability of decision-makers to know how well the curriculum is functioning to improve student learning. A student and program assessment plan is not in place in the Kenosha Unified School District. Board policies and administrative rules are inadequate in defining roles, responsibilities, and assessment strategies ensuring the consistent use of data to inform curriculum design and instruction. The scope of assessment available for the ongoing diagnosis of student acquisition of the curriculum is inadequate. While there is evidence district leadership is reporting student achievement data, there is no indication such data have been used systematically to evaluate the effectiveness of district policies, instructional practices, programs, and interventions. Without a comprehensive assessment plan, decisions about curriculum, instruction, compensatory programs, interventions, and other operational decision are subjective at best.

Increasingly, textbooks and other traditional educational resources are being replaced by electronic resources, including software applications and online learning programs. The rapidly evolving education technology marketplace already offers a wide variety of electronic resources from which teachers may choose. Selecting instructional technologies and electronic resources that facilitate curriculum delivery and student learning will be a challenge if school districts do not have protocols in place for evaluating these resources to ensure they are fully aligned with the district's adopted curriculum and state content standards. There are many software applications and online learning solutions in use across the Kenosha Unified School District, but there is no systematic process in place for evaluating or formally adopting these resources. A review of a sample of online programs currently used in the Kenosha Unified School District found some programs to be adequately aligned in content, context, and cognitive demand to support student attainment of the state content standards. Others

programs were found insufficiently aligned with state content standards to support students in their mastery of the content.

Changing national and state economic priorities have essentially eliminated the predictability of state educational funding. A predictable increase in state education funding has been replaced by year-to-year volatility. Increases in state school aid funding, if realized, are increasingly earmarked for implementation of state mandated initiatives and/or linked to measured growth in student achievement, thus limiting the spending authority of local school boards. School districts that have in place an effective, multi-year, curriculum-driven budgeting process are better positioned to adapt to fluctuations in anticipated funding while maintaining a clear focus on the district's own strategic mission and priorities. In the Kenosha Unified School District, a traditional budget development process is in place that lacks clear linkages between district goals, priorities, and budgetary allocations. Financial allocations have not been driven by clearly established program priorities, achievement needs, or cost-benefit analysis of educational programs and services. Also, the practice of planned operating budget deficits places the district in a precarious situation where it may be unable to respond to unforeseen economic conditions placing the district's educational programs at risk of disruption.

The efficacy of the recommendations contained in this audit report rests on the development of a comprehensive and focused board policy framework. Of all the requisite conditions necessary to put into place the components of a comprehensive curriculum management system, board policies are fundamental. When board policies are absent or unclear, it allows individuals to make decisions as they see fit, increasing the likelihood of inconsistencies and organizational conflicts. The scope of the adopted policies in the Kenosha Unified School District is inadequate to ensure that a framework exists capable of institutionalizing expectations, roles, responsibilities, and decision making to guide all necessary aspects of curriculum management and the educational program. Administrative rules should not substitute for board policies; rather, administrative rules are the tools through which the superintendent communicates expectations and defines the logistics by which board policies will be implemented.

The recommendations offered by the audit team to ameliorate the conditions outlined in the findings are based on practices known to have been effective in similar school systems and an analysis of the organizational intent and mission. All should help bring the school district closer to audit standards and improve student achievement results over time in the Kenosha Unified School District. Effecting change in the Kenosha Unified School District in terms of decision making, professional practices, and student achievement, however, will require more than simply implementing the recommendations outlined. In order to address persistent gaps in student achievement, the board, district leadership, and district staff will need to address institutional practices and beliefs that have limited the ability of all students to benefit from the district's educational programs and achieve at high levels. Also, consideration should be given to what parents may have to offer in support of the education goals established by the board through adoption of the Transformation Plan. Implementation of the audit recommendations included in this report will require systemic planning and will take months to several years to implement. Full implementation of the recommended actions of the board and professional staff will increase the likelihood that every child will experience high quality, personalized learning success in the Kenosha Unified School District.