
RECOMMENDATIONS

The permanent Superintendent, once selected, must raise the level of urgency concerning student performance among both internal and external stakeholders and break through the current culture of complacency that permeates the district by calling attention to the crisis. With the assistance of a guiding coalition, he must engage directly and aggressively in developing a theory of action for moving the District out of “Academic Emergency” (Kotter, 1996).

The Board and Superintendent should participate in a facilitated retreat this spring to discuss the Superintendent’s vision and proposed strategy for improving student outcomes, and concur on a set of long-term (3–5 year) goals for the district. Annual goals should be developed by the Superintendent and approved by the Board for the 2005–2006 school year based on these long-term goals. The annual operating budget for any given year should support the annual goals.

The Board must redirect its attention away from business and personnel issues and focus on developing criteria for evaluating the superintendent and periodically assessing progress towards established goals, preferably quarterly. We recommend that evaluation criteria for the Superintendent include two elements:

- A set of measurable outcomes directly related to the attainment of state standards and improvement of student achievement, i.e., state report card criteria.
- A set of process indicators in the form of annual goals that the superintendent is responsible to achieve.

Salary incentives for the Superintendent should be related to results in these areas.

The following steps should be taken in the short term to improve the capacity of the central office to lead necessary change:

1. The function of curriculum coordination, now divided among two individuals for K–8 and 9–12, should be consolidated under the new position of Chief Academic Officer (CAO). The CAO should also assume primary responsibility for the development and implementation of the District’s professional development plan.

We also recommend that the Deputy Superintendent position (now vacant) be repurposed to create the position of Chief Operating Officer (COO) to supervise all noninstructional functions, e.g., transportation, information technology, food service, custodial services, capital improvements.

This senior management organization is intended to enable the Superintendent to focus time and attention on leading change through the engagement of both internal and external stakeholders and supervising the attainment of goals across the organization.

2. The District should develop a set of goals and measurements to differentiate schools by instructional needs and capacity. This internal accountability system should place schools in categories on the basis of relative achievement and rate of improvement. Supervision of schools should be differentiated by achievement category, with those schools that are relatively high performing and improving receiving a high level of

autonomy and less supervision. Schools that are low performing and not improving at acceptable rates should receive intense district intervention. The current curriculum staff should be restructured and reconstituted to provide intervention to the lowest performing schools. The evaluation process for administrators should be aligned with this system.

3. The District's resource allocation processes for its \$56 million operating budget are on autopilot and are simply replicating the District's long-standing practices on an annual basis. Requisite to the capacity to modify the District's allocation of resources to meet new goals is the ability to identify current expenditures by site and function. We recommend that a budget document be developed that includes complete expenditures for each school and functional area, and that this document be disseminated widely as baseline data to ground decisions on resource reallocation relative to the District's goals. It is anticipated that significant reallocation of resources will need to occur to fund activities designed to improve student outcomes. As soon as a comprehensive budget document is available, a formal study of reallocation options should be initiated.
4. Our impression from visits and interviews suggests that there is significant variation in quality of principals among schools. Our findings suggest that the District places little emphasis on its development of principals. In addition, there are very few opportunities for teacher leadership at the school level. Within tight budgetary resources, the District needs to find an approach to leadership development for both current and aspiring principals, with emphasis on the instructional leadership and data management skills needed to raise student achievement.

In addition, the District should create a system for distinguishing among the levels of knowledge, skill, and expertise in the teaching force and create roles that give teachers special responsibilities in the system and greater investment in the change process. These roles should be integral to the District's theory of improvement and need not be an additional layer of administration or bureaucracy. The District should:

- Pilot a leadership development program for aspiring and new principals for the 2005–2006 school year emphasizing instructional skills and providing a collaborative forum for principals to come together to study specific examples of how to respond to the challenges of student performance.
 - Initiate discussions with the Mansfield Education Association to create a system of modest stipends for teacher leadership positions that will advance District goals, e.g., team leadership positions at the elementary and middle schools, leaders of specific “communities of practice” across schools. The exact nature of these positions should relate directly to the District's vision for instruction at each level.
5. Administrators in Mansfield have a strong interest in using data to support instructional improvement and decision making. Our findings suggest that the District is providing a significant amount of valuable data to schools, but that there is a wide variation on how student performance data are used across schools.

There is a need to develop a process involving the use of assessment data that can be easily and consistently applied. The test coordinator currently provides schools with large sets of data analyses, which one principal described as “a voluminous pile of hard-

to-read data.” An important aspect of data management is a technology solution to house and support the analysis and dissemination of data. We recommend the investigation of SchoolNet, an online planning tool used by many districts in Ohio, as a platform.

In addition, it is recommended that the District invest in a software solution to reroster student reports each year to provide teachers with the performance of their students on the previous year’s assessments so that teachers have data on the instructional needs of the students they are currently teaching.

6. Finally, we feel strongly that the District needs to begin immediately to revamp and expand its entire approach to professional development. What is needed is the development of a formal Professional Development Plan for approval by the Board of Education that:
 - Lays out staff development priorities based on analysis of student performance data, subject to annual updating.
 - Articulates the principles that will guide how professional development is conducted according to standards of good practice.
 - Specifies the types of professional development that will be supported by the district to help staff reach improvement goals for students.

The eight half-days school staff currently receive for professional development need to be reexamined and repurposed relative to achieving districts goals and improvement targets. As a District in Academic Emergency, capitalizing on the leverage of good professional development is a primary objective in the near term. The District should increase its funding of professional development toward the target of 1 percent to 2 percent of operating budget. As a part of this allocation the district should reward teachers who develop their skill levels by providing financial incentives for completion of and leadership of significant professional development experiences related to district goals.

In our visits to Mansfield, we found remarkably little evidence of parental and community involvement in the schools and virtually no evidence of civic or business engagement at the District level. We are not offering recommendations in this area at this time, as we believe that community involvement is currently a second-tier issue for the District. The process of creating vision, strategy, and goals is a data-driven, professionally led undertaking for which the Board and Superintendent are initially responsible. The existence of targets for student achievement and goals for district change provide a basis for engaging members of the community as to how goals will be achieved. The Superintendent needs to have a plan that he can articulate to corporate and civic groups to engage their support and define their role. The work of Paul Hill (1998) suggests that successful district reform is often developed internally and sustained externally. Support from the religious, business, and/or parental communities will be critical in sustaining the district’s improvement plan.