
INTRODUCTION

This report contains findings and recommendations of the American Institutes for Research (AIR) following its review of the Mansfield, Ohio, City School District. The purpose of the review was to identify key leverage points related to student performance that, if addressed effectively, would lead to improvement of student academic performance on indicators measured by the Ohio Department of Education and enable the district to emerge from its “Academic Emergency” status.

AIR representatives conducted site visits in the district over a period of 7 days: November 11, 12, 13, 22, and 23 and December 1 and 2, 2004. A final exit interview with district personnel to review preliminary findings and recommendations was held on December 13, 2004.

The AIR reviewers gathered data through structured observations of school and district practices, interviews with key personnel, observation of classroom instructional practices, and review of school and district assessment data, documents, and other artifacts. Data collected during these visits were analyzed for the purpose of this report along with student performance data. Analysis of student performance focused on Grade 3 reading achievement where the new assessment was administered for the first time in spring 2004.

The AIR reviewers possessed a high level of skill, knowledge, and successful experience in curriculum, assessment and instruction, organizational management, program evaluation, and special education. The following senior staff and consultants of AIR participated in the review and authored this report (area of review indicated in italics):

- Dr. Steven Adamowski and Mr. Joseph Olchefske—*district leadership, organization, and systems*
- Mr. Joseph Olchefske and Dr. Steven Leonard—*high school*
- Dr. Steven Leonard—*middle schools*
- Dr. Libia Gil and Dr. Deanna Burney—*elementary schools*
- Dr. Stephanie Jackson and Ms. Christina Diamond—*special education*
- Dr. Harold Doran—*data management*

The reviewers would like to extend their appreciation to Ms. Joyce Adair, K–8 Director of Curriculum, for her competent coordination of the review, her valuable, personal participation, and her gracious hospitality.

The report is organized in three sections. The first section discusses general findings and recommendations for district leadership and the central office in Mansfield. The second section discusses findings and recommendations focused on four levels of instruction: the high school, the middle schools, the elementary schools, and special education across the district. Finally, we highlight a set of initial recommendations that should guide the district’s priorities and be reflected in its improvements plans in the immediate future.

At the onset, it should be emphasized that the focus and recommendations of this report are not intended to present a balanced perspective of the strengths and weaknesses of the Mansfield City School District. In a relatively brief review of a district in “Academic Emergency” with unacceptably low collective levels of student performance, we are obligated to focus our attention on major performance barriers and our recommendations on redesign intended to strengthen the District’s capacity to improve student achievement.