

Chapter 1

Management, Personnel, and Communications

This chapter addresses operational areas of management, personnel, and communications as reviewed by the Office of Educational Quality & Accountability in the following sections:

- A. Governance
- B. Planning and Evaluation
- C. Organization and Management
- D. Personnel Management
- E. Community and Parent Involvement
- F. Communications/Public Relations

The organization and management of a school district involves cooperation between elected members of the board of education and staff of the district. The school board's role is to establish goals and objectives for the district in both instructional and operational areas, determine the policies by which the district will be governed, approve the plans to implement those policies, provide the funding sources necessary to carry out the plans, and evaluate the results of those plans.

Once the school board adopts goals and objectives for the district, it is the responsibility of the superintendent and staff to establish administrative guidelines and procedures to achieve the desired results. That achievement involves recommending the hiring and retention of employees, as well as ongoing communication with the community to ensure a clear understanding of the goals and the district's efforts to accomplish them.

Background

When examining Oklahoma Public Schools (OKPS), it is vital to remember that schools carry out their mission on diverse playing fields. This section provides a generalized depiction of community characteristics that an average school district in Oklahoma serves. OEQA's State and District Profiles 2017 report offers statistical representations of these variables detailing the state's average for the 2016-17 school year.

Exhibit 1-1 shows the average student enrollment and socioeconomic characteristics for the 2016-17 school year for all schools in the state of Oklahoma. Of all students enrolled at each school, an average of 62.7 percent was eligible for free or reduced-price meals. For the first time the state's percentage of students coming from a minority/ethnic population (51 percent) was greater than the percentage of Caucasian students (49 percent) attending Oklahoma's traditional public schools.

Exhibit 1-1
OKPS Districts’ Average Student Enrollment and Socioeconomic Characteristics (2016-17)

| School | Fall Enrollment | Caucasian | Black | Asian | Hispanic | Native American | Two or More Races | Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Meals |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------|-------|-------|----------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Oklahoma Schools (EC-12) | 1,279 | 49.4% | 8.8% | 2.3% | 16.8% | 13.9% | 8.8% | 62.7% |

Source: Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, Profiles Database

Exhibit 1-2 shows demographic changes over the last five years in OKPS. As ADM has increased by 2.7 percent, the average assessed property valuation per student increased by 8.4 percent, and eligibility for free and reduced-price meals decreased by 0.2 percentage points (pp). Other notable changes were the decrease in Caucasian student enrollment, the increase in Hispanic students, and the decrease in Native American students.

Exhibit 1-2
OKPS Change in Demographics from 2012-13 to 2016-17

| School Year | ADM | Ethnic Group | | | | | Average Assessed Property Valuation per Student | Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Meals |
|---------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| | | Caucasian | Black | Asian | Hispanic | Native American | | |
| 2012-13 | 1,271 | 59% | 9% | 2% | 14% | 16% | \$45,631.00 | 62.9% |
| 2013-14 | 1,292 | 59% | 9% | 2% | 15% | 15% | \$45,248.00 | 62% |
| 2014-15 | 1,299 | 59% | 9% | 2% | 16% | 15% | \$47,329.00 | 61% |
| 2015-16 | 1,305 | 58% | 9% | 2% | 16% | 14% | \$49,623.00 | 62% |
| 2016-17 | 1,267 | 49% | 9% | 2% | 17% | 14% | \$49,471.00 | 62.7% |
| Change | (2.9%) ▼ | (10 pp) ▼ | No change | No change | 3 pp ▲ | (2pp) ▼ | 8.4% ▲ | (0.2pp) ▼ |

Source: Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, Profiles Database

A. GOVERNANCE

The legal foundation of school districts is critical to the overall functioning of the organization since it defines the locus of power that determines how school boards and executive personnel may carry out their assigned responsibilities. The education of students is reserved to the states by the Constitution of the United States of America. Historically, states have adopted provisions that place the governance and day-to-day management of schools in the hands of local authorities, typically local school boards. These school boards generally have broad powers to establish policy, enter into contracts, develop budgets and employ personnel.

Among the 50 states there is considerable variation in the legal structure of school districts. Some school districts are fiscally independent and do not have to depend upon the state or another entity for fiscal resources, while others are totally dependent on other entities for their



resources. For example, school districts in some states must rely on city councils, county commissions, or like bodies and the state for budget approval and funds. Some school districts must take budget proposals or operating tax levies to the public for approval, and other boards have latitude to set budgets and approve revenue levies within the constraints of law. In Oklahoma, school boards rely on a combination of local, state, and federal resources to support education programs.

The primary state laws controlling the governance and operation of schools in Oklahoma are found in Title 70 of the Oklahoma School Code (OSC). These laws give the local board of education broad powers to adopt policies, fix contracts, approve the appointment of personnel, develop and approve a budget, and accept other actions designed to ensure secure, safe and successful schools for its citizens.

OKPS Districts hold board elections each February. The board members swear in elected members and vote on officers at the next meeting. Board members are elected for four-year terms from resident wards or areas. Vacated positions having unexpired terms can be filled by appointment to the position by the board of education or by special election. On completion of the unexpired term, the position is filled through the regular election process. Sections 157, 158, and 159 of the OSC list the duties of each officer of the board of education. The board must elect a clerk, who may or may not be a member of the board.

Section 127 outlines the training requirements for school board members. Within 15 months following election, *new* school board members are required to complete 12 hours of instruction on education issues in the areas of:

- school finance;
- legal issues (employment, due process, new laws, the *Oklahoma Open Records Act* and the *Oklahoma Open Meeting Act*); and
- duties and responsibilities of district board of education members (including special education and ethics).

The 12 hours must include one hour of instruction in school finance, one hour of instruction in the *Oklahoma Open Records Act* and the *Oklahoma Open Meeting Act*, and one hour of instruction in ethics. The remaining hours may be satisfied by attending a two-day workshop to be held by the State Department of Education or other workshops held by another organization or association approved by the Oklahoma State Board of Education.

Reelected board members are required to complete six hours of instruction within 15 months of reelection. Included in these six hours is one hour of instruction in the following:

- school finance;
- the *Oklahoma Open Records Act* and the *Oklahoma Open Meeting Act*; and
- ethics.

The remaining hours may be satisfied by attending a workshop, class or seminar addressing the education issues set forth above for new members.

Board of Education Meetings

For most districts, the Board of Education meets on a specific day of the month, specific time and place such as the Administration Building. The meeting place and time may be changed by agreement of a majority of the board members. Special meetings are held as needed, and board members receive agendas and any supporting information in advance of the meeting.

Generally, superintendents provide the board of education with a packet during the week before each meeting. Typically, routine business items are combined on the consent agenda and acted upon before moving onto other topics. Board Meeting Agendas are posted online on the school website and in other locations such as the front door of the district's administration building. Minutes of all board meetings are recorded and archived in various formats (online and hard copy) and kept in specified locations such as the file cabinet within the superintendent's office. Special meetings are scheduled as the need arises.

FINDING 1-1

Upon an examination of reports, feedback from focus groups and interviews with district personnel and board members, it is often discovered that the relationship among the board, superintendent, and administrative staff has evolved into a model of mutual respect with a clear focus on student needs. While many times board of education policy is silent on communications with employees, surveys indicate that if a board member has an issue it is typically processed through the superintendent or one of his designees.

Often interviews of administrative staff and board members show that mutual respect is a hallmark of excellence in relationships among the board, superintendent, administration, and staff. This level of respect is often observed by the OSPR review team, including board meetings that the team attends. The review team believes that this clearly represents an excellent example of how to conduct school district business.

Exhibit 1-3 presents the results from a survey sample of OKPS staff who were asked if they agree with the following two statements: Statement #1 "*School board members know and understand the educational needs of students in the district*" and Statement #2 "*The School board members listen to the opinions and desires of others*". This sampling revealed that of those staff members surveyed, 65 percent stated that they agree with the statement #1, while 25% had no opinion and only 10 percent disagreed. Sampling results for statement #2 indicate that 68 percent of staff surveyed agreed, 30 percent had no opinion and only two percent disagreed.

Exhibit 1-3
Sampling of Staff Survey Results Regarding School Board Effectiveness

| Number | Statement | Agree | No Opinion | Disagree |
|--------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|------------|----------|
| 1 | School board members know and understand the educational needs of students in the district. | 65% | 25% | 10% |
| 2 | School board members listen to the opinions and desires of stakeholders (parents, staff, community members). | 68% | 30% | 2% |

Source: OEQA Sampling from Archived District Surveys 2004-2017

RECOMMENDATION

Boards of Education should establish exemplary relationships of civility and professionalism in its dealings with each other, the public, and school district employees.

Although most survey respondents and focus group participants indicate their Boards of Education know the needs of their district and can work well with stakeholders, there should be concern with the higher percentages of “no opinion”. Board members should strengthen their communication with all constituents to minimize the percentage of those who have no opinion or are disengaged.

FINDING 1-2

It has been noted over the past 15 years of OSPR performance reviews that many boards of education policy manuals contain the superintendent’s job description, but do not provide adequate performance assessment guidelines. Some districts used in the past the now outdated minimum criteria for effective administrative performance or evaluation instruments generated from online educational sites. These tools are not usually compatible and do not assess the superintendent’s job performance as it relates to the board’s adopted goals/standards. Consequently, the evaluation process may lack a systemic consistency and is unrelated to the goals set by the entire board. This method could result in providing the superintendent with performance feedback that contains inconsistencies resulting in confusion.

RECOMMENDATION

Revise the superintendent’s performance evaluation to include a performance review that is based on board-superintendent goals/standards that are established and evaluated by the board.

Exhibit 1-4 shows a sample of five standards or goals that a Superintendent’s evaluation instrument may be aligned to in order to ensure a fair analysis of the superintendent’s performance.

Exhibit 1-4
Five Foundational Standards to Frame a Superintendent's Evaluation Tool

1. **Vision, Culture & Instructional Leadership** – The superintendent leads the district by promoting the success of all students, articulating a vision of learning, developing a positive school climate and demonstrating best practices in instructional programs and staff professional development.
2. **Operations, Resource & Personnel Management** – The superintendent demonstrates the knowledge, skills and ability to effectively manage operations that promote a safe and effective environment for students and staff, ensures the fiscal health of the district, and implements sound personnel practices.
3. **Board Governance & Policy** – The superintendent works effectively with the board of education, exhibits a shared understanding of board and superintendent roles, leads and manages the district consistently with the board's policies, and demonstrates the skills to work effectively with the board.
4. **Communication & Community Relations** – The superintendent establishes effective communication with students, parents, staff and community, and has the knowledge and awareness of different cultures among all community members to effectively engage and respond to diverse interests and needs to support the success of all students.
5. **Ethical Leadership** – The superintendent promotes the success of every student and every staff member by acting with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner.

NY School Board Association (2018)¹

Developing and adopting a uniform assessment procedure that is used by the board as a whole can result in providing a unified series of recommendations and eliminate the possibility of inconsistencies that could arise. Suggested evaluation criteria for a superintendent's evaluation that could be used as a basis for discussion and the formulation of procedures that are acceptable to the Board of Education and the superintendent can include the following:

- establishment of a specific time frame each year for conducting the performance evaluation;
- the development of an assessment instrument that includes a specific listing of board-superintendent goals that are related to school performance and other agreed upon indicators;
- provision for establishing performance goals and related outcomes for the next year;
- consideration can be given to using the Merit Award system, shown later as a guide to customizing an instrument for the superintendent's performance review, since goals can easily be included in this type of format;

¹ <https://www.nyssba.org/member-services/board-and-superintendent-evaluation-tools/>

- provision for the individual board members to rate the superintendent on an agreed upon form that includes the board goals;
- provision for all board members to meet to compile board member ratings, discussing all aspects of the superintendent's performance, and developing a single evaluation report to be reviewed with the superintendent; and
- guidelines for the actual evaluation review session, in executive session or in public, with the board president as spokesperson, and other possible procedural matters.

It is the responsibility of the school board to evaluate the performance of the superintendent. No process or instrument is completely objective. There will always be some subjectivity, but every evaluation process should foster a fair analysis of the superintendent's performance.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

FINDING 1-3

Some OKPS districts do not have a plan for the regular review and update of board policies. Although most all Board policies are published in book format (manuals) and sometimes online, limited effort or focus is put forth to review and update policies on an annual or semi-annual basis.

The maintenance of board policies and procedures is best accomplished through an annual review of legislative action and changes to the law. This is a major component of the School Board's role in a school district. The superintendent and his staff have a responsibility to facilitate this role by providing information to the board when laws or legislation change and how those changes impact school district operations.

RECOMMENDATION

Develop a process to annually review and update the School Board Policy Manual.

This is a task that can be accomplished with the help of a two-person board policy committee, established by an action of the board and designated to work with the superintendent for the review of one-third of the policies annually. The end users of the policies can be asked to review the policies that affect them and provide feedback to the board committee and superintendent concerning potential changes that may be needed.

The superintendent, in conversation with the two designated board members, can formulate recommended changes, and the two board committee members, working with the board president, can place the proposed policy changes on the agenda for review. Following a whole-board review, the final form of the policy change should be brought for approval at the next board meeting. Policies reviewed and/or revised should carry a notation and date reflecting when the action was taken.

Policies provide a basis of continuity to district and school level decisions. Consistent policies serve to inform the public regarding how the district operates and convey a sense of stability and fairness.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources. Moving forward, the district should consider a more efficient approach such as subscribing to the OSSBA policy service for \$750 per year.

B. PLANNING AND EVALUATION

To be effective, a strategic plan must lay out key milestones to measure progress, establish a priority ordering of the items to be accomplished, provide a timeline for which each item is to be accomplished, and assign accountability for each item to a specified position in the school district organization. Finally, the organization must provide periodic reports on the status of the plan's implementation and any changes that must be made due to unforeseen circumstances or changes in assumptions.

According to Cook (2000), strategic planning requires total concentration of the organization's resources on mutually pre-determined measurable outcomes.² Strategic planning allows an organization to have a clear focus on what it is doing and what it intends to do based upon established and monitored goals. A strategic plan will include long-term goals, which typically can be achieved in five to ten years. Short-term goals, which typically can be achieved in a year, support the attainment of the long-term goals.

Reeves (2007) contrasts Cook's definitions of strategic planning with Kotter. He indicates that Cook views strategic planning as a continuous effort by strategic organizations that involves creating a plan for dealing with strategic issues, making strategic decisions, and taking strategic actions. Reeves described the definition of strategic planning by Kotter as simply a collection of actions that add value to the organization.³

Reeves also summarizes his own study with White, which analyzed hundreds of strategic plans across 20 dimensions, controlled for school demographics, and compared student achievement to a baseline year. The study found that significantly higher achievement was realized if strategic plans included: monthly monitoring of student performance, teacher strategies, and leadership practices, continued self-evaluation by teachers and administrators regarding every program initiative and strategy; plus, attribution by teachers and leaders that their work is the fundamental cause of student growth rather than demographics.

² Cook, Jr., W. (2000). *Strategics: The art and science of holistic strategy*. Westport, Connecticut: Quorum Books.

³ Reeves, D.B. (2007). *Leading to change/making strategic planning work*. *Educational Leadership*, 65(4) 1-4, 2007-2008.

Reeves concludes that school leaders must decide whether the strategic planning process is focused on achievement and therefore adds value or is a broader end to itself whether tied to achievement gain or not.

All too often, organizations develop strategic plans that are broad statements with no ties to specific goals. For example, a school district may establish a goal of “improving student performance” without setting a target or identifying the strategies it plans to employ to achieve the desired outcome, or even fully defining “student performance.” A better goal would be “improving student achievement by 10 percent from last year to this year as measured by state standardized testing.” The district would then identify the means by which this goal would be achieved, such as through additional small group instruction with benchmark testing to monitor progress.

According to the Balanced Scorecard Institute:

There are many different frameworks and methodologies for strategic planning and management. While there are no absolute rules regarding the right framework, most follow a similar pattern and have common attributes. Many frameworks cycle through some variation on some very basic phases:

1. analysis or assessment, where an understanding of the current internal and external environments is developed;
2. strategy formulation, where high level strategy is developed and a basic organization level strategic plan is documented;
3. strategy execution, where the high -level plan is translated into more operational planning and action items; and
4. evaluation or sustainment/management phase, where ongoing refinement and evaluation of performance, culture, communications, data reporting, and other strategic management issues occurs.⁴

The graphic in **Exhibit 1-5** explains the logic of the balanced scorecard approach to strategic planning.

⁴ <http://balancedscorecard.org/Resources/Strategic-Planning-Basics>

**Exhibit 1-5
Balanced Scorecard Approach**



Source: Balanced Scorecard Institute⁵, September 2008

FINDING 1-4

A common omission in some OKPS districts is not adopting an annual strategic planning process. As a result, districts make annual budget decisions and operational changes without the benefit of a multi-year plan needed to achieve prioritized long-range goals and objectives. Both short and long-term goals and objectives may not be consistent from school year to school year. Districts need to move past the day to day survival thinking and actively plan for the future of the school district. Such School Boards do not hold routine retreats or workshops devoted to goal setting or strategic planning. Strategic planning related to all areas of operations can assist in efforts to improve student academic achievement, for bonding related to facility needs, and establish appropriate roles and responsibilities for all staff members.

Interviews, surveys, and focus groups indicate that many stakeholders were unaware of their district’s strategic plan or the process involved in planning. **Exhibit 1-6** shows that 46 percent of staff surveyed *agree* that the district has a long-range strategic plan that guides the decision-making process. However, thirty percent of survey participants have no opinion and 24 percent of staff *disagree* that the district has a long-range strategic planning process.

⁵ <http://www.balancedscorecard.org/BSCResources/TheNineStepsToSuccess/tabid/58/Default.aspx>

Exhibit 1-6
Staff Survey Responses Related to Strategic Planning

| Survey Statement | Agree | No Opinion | Disagree |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|---------------|----------|
| The district has a long-range strategic plan that guides the decision-making process. | 46% | 30% | 24% |

Source: OEQA Sampling from Archived District Surveys 2004-2017

The board of education and superintendent must recognize the linkages between superintendent goals and ultimately what happens in the classroom, and in management of the district. There must be an established common terminology, vision and mission for the school district. Strategic planning efforts should result in a feeling of confidence in all stakeholders and an appreciation for the journey of continuous improvement.

RECOMMENDATION

Design a system of strategic planning and accountability to reflect school improvement goals and school district needs. This should include the evaluation of all programs in use by the district and the recommendations in this report as the basis for the plan.

School districts that have received an Oklahoma School Performance Review can use their review report's series of tactical recommendations as a basis for long-term strategic planning. Over time, the district can enhance or add to the plan as it implements the various recommendations.

The board and superintendent should oversee the development of this long-term strategic plan and coordinate the actions of staff to assigned prioritized goals. By doing so, districts can allocate financial resources in annual budgets based on a consistency with the goals established in the long-term strategic plan. The district should review the plan annually or in shorter time increments as deemed appropriate. Review of the long-term strategic plan should address ensuring that the prioritized recommendations in this report remain at the top of the list or change as needed. The plan should include steps to ensure that staff assigned responsibilities for implementation are successful and that the cost/benefit of the goals continues to make sense based upon funding for current and future years.

FISCAL IMPACT

The boards and superintendents can undertake the process of prioritizing the recommendations, developing a timeline for implementing each recommendation, and assigning a staff member to be responsible for each recommendation. This approach has no fiscal impact. As an alternative, the district may want some assistance in facilitating how to prioritize the recommendations, determining a reasonable timeline for accomplishing each one, and selecting the methods used to measure progress. This approach would have a fiscal impact. Consultants estimate a onetime cost of \$7,500 for facilitating this process based on a district size of < 2,000 students and a follow-up cost of \$4,000 divided evenly over the next two years.

| Recommendation | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------|--------|
| Develop a long-term strategic plan using the recommendations in this report as the basis for the plan. | (\$7,500) | (\$2,000) | (\$2,000) | 0 | 0 |

FINDING 1-5

Although numerous OKPS districts have strategic plans in place, there are no formal and visible processes for annually assessing progress against the plan and then modifying annual goals to reflect progress or changes in circumstances and data. To support the strategic plan as the guiding document, establishing a process for annual strategic plan goal evaluation and adjustments should involve the board of education.

The data gathered in this strategic plan evaluation activity can form the basis for a superintendent annual evaluation process, and thus provide the benchmarks (short-term goals) for moving a strategic plan forward long term. The superintendent’s annual goals then provide a focus for all administration and become a part of the goals for principals. This ensures that the district administration is all marching in the same direction. The goals must also reach the classroom level, making teachers aware of the direction and asking that they initiate appropriate improvements as well, in line with district goals.

RECOMMENDATION

Establish an annual retreat for the superintendent, school board, principals, and relevant staff for evaluating and updating the strategic plan.

The implementation would involve a school board meeting scheduled with just this agenda item: strategic plan evaluation and review. No action items would be voted upon. Discussions and reports from the superintendent and staff should specifically review the previous year strategic plan goals, evaluation evidence, how implementation could have gone better, and outline recommendations for benchmark goals for implementation during the next school year. Ideally, the board of education and staff should meet off site. This meeting would be followed by a regular board of education meeting to formally approve adjustments to the plan.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.



FINDING 1-6

To fully support strategic plan implementation, communication efforts must be continuous. In many districts, stakeholder groups have noted disconnects regarding current internal communications related to the plan.

To realize strategic goals, information and input must flow upward from staff and downward from the board and through the superintendent and administration to staff. In this process, the principals become key facilitators for conveying the superintendent's and board goals and representing the needs of staff in appropriate forums. In school improvement efforts, maintaining communication can often be the most difficult issue. Two-way communication and input with all stakeholders must be maintained.

RECOMMENDATION

Review communication efforts at all levels of the organization and implement procedures for including representatives from various stakeholder groups to be part of the strategic plan's dissemination.

The goal should be that every initiative is discussed and/or information provided to all internal stakeholders, from teacher to bus driver. This can be accomplished by identifying which stakeholder groups are not getting either daily information or critical issue communications or both, and then devising changes to assure information is fully distributed. Districts can rely on traditional messaging and meetings such as principals meeting with staff or adopt a more updated communication system.

OKPS districts might also establish a communications council that meets with the superintendent to discuss the district's improvement journey and get answers to questions. Representatives then report back to their constituents.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

FINDING 1-7

Many districts do not systematically secure grants to supplement district funds and federal program resources for school improvement initiatives or classroom projects. Due to the lack of a grant writing process, this limits districts accessibility to possible additional funding to provide supplementary staffing, purchase additional technology, offer professional development, and expand instructional and support services to students.

Grant opportunities vary depending on location and need. There are a variety of grants available from state, federal, and charitable organizations that will help meet district needs. Programs often require that the district partner with other entities, which is a great start with for districts that have partnership program goals.

The Oklahoma State Department of Education (SDE) offers access to the federally funded 21st

Century grant for innovative after-school programs that support student achievement. This grant fund would be accessible to the district for different schools or different collaborative partners.⁶

The SDE also offers the Math Science Partnership grant that helps districts implement programs to improve math and science instruction. This grant requires a partnership of the district with a college or university to work with teacher learning and connect the classroom with real scientists.⁷

Oklahoma Educational Technology Trust (OETT) grants include the following two phases:

- **Phase I: Leadership Training** - Phase I teaches the IDEALS (Inquiry, Discourse, Equity, Authenticity, Leadership, and Service) for Student Achievement and how they relate to technology use in the classroom. Superintendents or administrators in Oklahoma schools and/or districts must complete Phase I before applying for Phase II.
- **Phase II: Grants to Schools** - Phase II provides individual school site and/or district competitive grants. Each OETT grant school receives a maximum of \$40,000, which includes technology equipment and up to \$4,000 in staff release time, and \$25,000 in professional development provided by the K20 Center/OK-ACTS. Grant recipients are required to provide a 10 percent match of \$4,000.⁸

The Oklahoma Regents for Higher Education offers Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grants to public school. GEAR UP prepares middle and high school students for college through academic preparation programs and scholarships for students, professional learning opportunities for educators, and college access information for students and parents. The K-20 Center also offers a GEAR UP grant that provides technology for a cohort of youth as they move from seventh grade to graduation. Professional development is provided to teachers at each grade level as the cohort group moves from one grade to the next.⁹

Foundations grants are available to fill additional needs. The National Education Foundation offers teachers and teacher leadership teams grants ranging from \$2,000 to \$5,000. Private foundations such as the Lois Lenski Covey Foundation (LLCF) awards grants ranging from \$300 to \$3,000 annually to public libraries and schools throughout the United States.¹⁰ Meanwhile, entities in Oklahoma, such as the Inasmuch Foundation¹¹ and the Kirkpatrick Foundation¹² offer grants of various sizes and purposes to schools throughout the state.

Writing grants for programs such as these is also a good way to foster community service and generate parent involvement with the school. High school and elementary teachers can also pursue grants to support the classroom. The Wal-Mart Foundation and Donors Choice grants can

⁶ <http://ok.gov/sde/21cclc>

⁷ <http://ok.gov/sde/title-ii-part-b>

⁸ <http://oett.org/grantmaking/>

⁹ <http://www.okgearup.org>

¹⁰ <http://www.loislenski Covey.org>

¹¹ <http://www.inasmuchfoundation.org/>

¹² <http://kirkpatrickfoundation.com/grants/>

fund special learning projects.

Shrinking budgets have also lightened mandates from the state for various types of expenditures, such as library collections, textbooks, and professional development. With state funding for education remaining below what schools received in 2008, districts increasingly must pursue competitive grants from various private and public entities.

Some OKPS districts contract with professional grant writers to provide grant writing services in accordance with the needs of the district. The additional grant money supplements federal program resources resulting in significant benefit to the district. For example, one district¹³ obtained a grant from 2006-07 to 2011-12 funding ranged from \$237,156 to \$1,031,800. These funds were in addition to federal allocations from Title I, REAP, and Title VI (Indian Education).

RECOMMENDATION

School leaders should study the eligibility of their own districts for obtaining various grants and develop a plan of action to seek available funding.

The superintendent should request district and community volunteers to serve on a committee to look at the availability of external resources. The committee should research and prioritize grant funding opportunities, recognizing that it may need to pursue many smaller grants rather than one larger one.

The committee should also consider training a teacher cadre of grant writers to assist with attaining some of the smaller grants while using a grant writer to pursue the larger grants. There are several grant writers in the state who work on commission. The district could utilize such a writer's services with no upfront cost.¹⁴

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

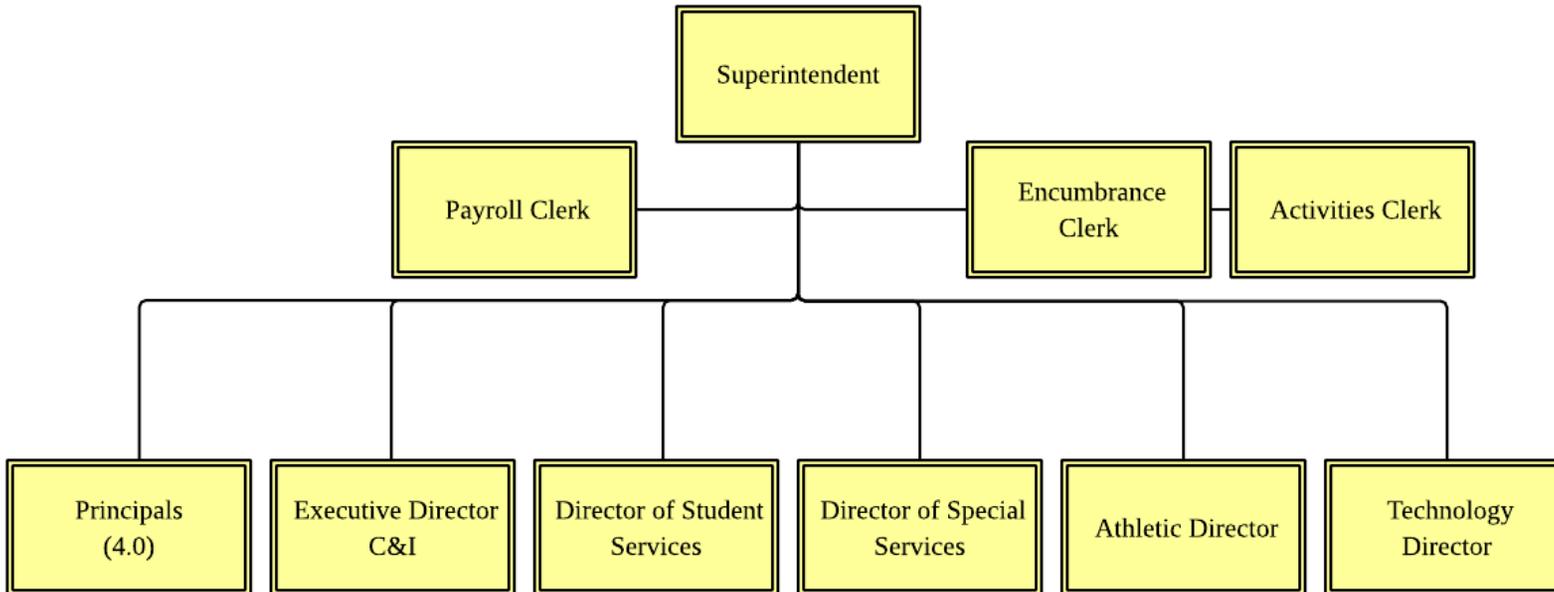
C. ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

The superintendent of a school district serves as the chief executive officer and is the administrative leader responsible for policy implementation and day-to-day operations. An effective central office organizational structure is essential to the efficient delivery of services throughout a school district. Efficient central office organizational structures have the appropriate spans of control for district leadership with clearly defined lines of authority that are reflected in the district's organization charts. Effective central office structures encourage

¹³ Crescent Public Schools has obtained services of a grant writer and would serve as a resource.

communication at all levels. **Exhibit 1-7** reflects a sample organizational chart that reflects a medium sized district in Oklahoma.

Exhibit 1-7
Sample Administrative Organizational Chart



Source: OEQA Archived Sample Organizational Chart

FINDING 1-8

Some districts' existing organizational arrangements are not accurately portrayed nor communicated to stakeholders. The actual duties and reporting lines related to recently added positions are not reflected in the district's organizational chart or directory. This situation reduces the usefulness of the current organization chart and is confusing to those in the organization that must communicate with the administrative central office.

In reviewing an organization's structure and distribution of responsibilities, the consulting team employs a series of key benchmarks, including:

- Are functions logically grouped? Could the service be provided more effectively and efficiently if it were located elsewhere in the organization?
- Are line and staff relationships properly determined?
- Is accountability for performance defined so that managers know what is expected of their performance?
- Are key roles and responsibilities sufficiently defined? Do job descriptions reflect those responsibilities?
- Do positions at each level have sufficient time or focus on responsibilities that are key to their level in the organization? For example, are deputy/associate/assistant superintendents focusing sufficiently on planning and vision versus day-to-day activities?
- Are the spans of control at each level of management reasonable?
- Is decision-making delegated to the most effective level in the organization?

RECOMMENDATION

Superintendents should realign their district's central organizational arrangement to reflect new positions and responsibilities for functional areas managed.

Superintendents proposing a realignment of the district's internal structure and organizational functions could consider the following actions to ensure a smooth realignment process:

- Ensure the organizational system aligns with the district's mission statement.
- Draft "functional statements" that clearly define the purpose and responsibilities of each level (i.e., Administration, Office, Division, etc.) within the institution.
- Create an organizational chart (using a graphic illustration) of the organization showing all current/new major positions within the district, and lines depicting levels within the agency (Administration, Office, Division, Schools, etc.)
- Include proposed staffing patterns - a listing of the number and types of positions allocated to the LEA

- Devise a realignment crosswalk – Listing of positions (both encumbered and vacant) indicating current and proposed classifications, organizational locations, etc., that result from the realignment
- Provide current and proposed descriptions for each position affected by the realignment

The central office administrative organization will appear to be optimal concerning their assigned duties when an effective organizational realignment occurs and all staff are informed of the structure. For districts who have had success in this area, interviews, surveys, and focus groups suggested that the administrative office was viewed in a positive manner by both staff and parents.

An example of survey results of a few previously reviewed districts support this perception of an effective central office organization. In response to the statement regarding the central office communicating effectively with district staff. Exhibit 1- 84 percent *agree* (**Exhibit 1-8**). Staff also believes the district communicates effectively with parents and community members (85 percent). Most parents believe that district and school staffs are accessible (75 percent).

Exhibit 1-8
Survey Responses Regarding the Central Office Administration

| Survey Group | Survey Statement | Agree | No Opinion | Disagree |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|------------|----------|
| Staff | The district administration supports the educational process. | 84% | 9% | 7% |
| Staff | Most administrative practices in the school district are highly efficient and effective. | 85% | 7% | 8% |
| Parent | District and school staffs are accessible to parents. | 75% | 8% | 16% |

Source: OEQA Sampling from Archived District Surveys 2004-2017

FINDING 1-9

Many OKPS superintendents actively engage in succession planning for exiting staff and ensure there is cross-training or side-by-side training for new staff. Succession planning provides for continuity of effort and smooth transitions in the school district. Fifteen years of interviews suggest that staff are highly satisfied when this process is in place and appreciate the attention to detail and the knowledge of what comes next as people leave the service of the district.

In many school districts today, hiring practices for administrative leaders often consist of “replacement filling” – waiting for a position to open before searching for candidates. Instead, districts should consider successful succession planning or “proactive filling” that requires an appraisal of anticipated district needs, a clearly outlined plan with measurable objectives and a set of standardized evaluative criteria.¹⁵

¹⁵ <https://www.districtadministration.com/article/stepping-school-leadership>

RECOMMENDATION**District Superintendents should incorporate succession planning, which in turn creates the conditions for continuity in the school district.**

A primary method to invest in human capital is to develop a succession plan, which simultaneously builds a list of qualified candidates while anticipating district needs before they become urgent. In the Hanover Research (2014), the study addressed the shortcomings of current strategies. Key Findings from this report are as follows¹⁶:

- Succession planning requires an appraisal of anticipated district needs, a clearly outlined plan with measurable objectives, and a set of standardized evaluative criteria.
- In order to deepen the candidate pool of qualified successors, districts can identify candidates by providing incremental or smaller opportunities for motivated individuals.
- Mentoring programs and coaching provide exceptional candidates with on-the-job training that is essential for success in a new leadership role.
- The most effective transition periods involve overlap in order to ensure agenda continuity and provide continued support for the new hire.
- Annual updates are essential in order to plan for future needs.
- Effective succession plans are able to clearly define the assessment standards against which new and experienced hires are measured.

D. PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Personnel costs typically represent the largest expense in school districts. As a result, efficient and effective management of human resource functions is critical to the overall effectiveness of a district. In small districts, human resource functions are usually managed by the superintendent with clerical assistance. Typical tasks of a school district's human resources department include the following:

- recruiting employees;
- overseeing the interviewing, selection, and processing of new employees;
- retaining employees;
- processing promotions, transfers, and resignations;
- determining and maintaining compensation schedules;

¹⁶<https://www.hanoverresearch.com/media/Best-Practices-in-Succession-Planning.pdf>

- managing insurance programs;
- managing employee benefits programs;
- planning and forecasting personnel needs;
- maintaining complete employee records, including records on training and certification;
- developing and maintaining job descriptions, which would include establishing required job credentials;
- managing the employee evaluation process;
- handling employee complaints and grievances, including grievance procedures;
- developing personnel policies; and
- ensuring that the employer follows all laws and regulations.

To support the mission of a school district, it is important that these human resources functions be efficient, effective, and aligned to federal and state law. Like most employers, public school districts must comply with federal laws governing human resources management. These laws include:

- *Fair Labor Standards Act*, which governs wages and hourly payments;
- *Americans with Disabilities Act*, which requires employers to provide reasonable accommodation to any employee or job applicant who has a disability; and
- *Equal Employment Opportunity Act*, which prevents employers from making hiring and firing decisions based upon age, race, religion, gender, or other factors not related to performance.

In addition, state laws govern school district human resource administration in areas such as grievances, due process, termination, and contract renewal. Personnel selection and retention are part of a continuous process necessary to ensure an experienced, quality teaching staff.

Personnel management coordination in most districts is the overall responsibility of the superintendent, assisted by clerical staff and principals. The area of professional development is normally the responsibility of the principal or director of curriculum and instruction and assisted by the professional development committee. The managers of maintenance, transportation, and child nutrition generally have responsibility for support staffing and evaluation in their respective areas. Personnel records and benefits documentation are maintained normally by a personnel clerk; the payroll clerk generates a monthly payroll with information provided by the personnel clerk and employee records.

Exhibit 1-9 reflects survey responses from a sampling of archived staff surveys from the past 15 years as related to district personnel practices. On average most surveys results suggested most

practices in personnel operations were overall satisfactory with some indicators having a higher level of satisfaction for some districts while other indicators were not as satisfactory.

**Exhibit 1-9
Staff Survey Responses Regarding District Personnel**

| Survey Statement | Agree | No Opinion | Disagree |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|------------|----------|
| I have an accurate job description. | 69% | 21% | 10% |
| I know to whom I report for all my job functions. | 94% | 4% | 2% |
| I understand the district’s salary schedule and justification for paying extra-duty stipends. | 67% | 15% | 18% |
| The district actively recruits high quality staff to fill vacant positions. | 52% | 19% | 29% |
| The district has a pool of quality substitutes to fill positions when necessary. | 46% | 20% | 35% |

Source: OEQA Sampling from Archived District Surveys 2004-2017

FINDING 1-10

Some districts have not adopted procedures for ensuring that personnel files and records are uniform in content and maintained in a secure environment. A review of randomly selected personnel files has shown in many cases that checklists are included in some, but do not accurately reflect the presence or absence of specified documents. While those responsible for the maintenance of files that hold personal and confidential information are committed to accurate and timely recordkeeping, the question of security of files with such personal data in them had never previously been raised. In a few districts the files were not kept locked regardless of the high volume of traffic nearby the files. The files are in easy reach, creating the possibility of a breach of confidentiality. It is imperative that additional precautions be taken to protect the privacy of staff records. Additionally, procedures may not be in place to secure the office when office staff are at lunch or absent. Further, personnel files maintained in some administration offices are kept in files that are not fireproof.

According to the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) guidelines, personnel files and medical records are private documents and should be maintained in locked file cabinets in a secure location. Files should only be accessible to those people with a legitimate need to access the files. Special guidelines apply to securing and handling medical information obtained through medical examinations and tests.¹⁷

¹⁷ www.shrm.org



RECOMMENDATION

Ensure that personnel files follow SHRM guidelines regarding the content of personnel files and are kept in secured fireproof containers.

Personnel files should contain specified uniform documents. **Exhibit 1-10** reflects a sample analysis of personnel files selected randomly by a consulting team. The selected district's files contained 10 items that were required by district policy. In this example the consulting team found that the district maintained the required I-9 documentation inside the personnel folders. Keeping I-9 documentation inside personnel folders does not meet the requirements of the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). As noted by USCIS, supervisors should not have ready access to I-9 forms because they contain information on national origin, immigration status, marital status, and other protected information.¹⁴ The I-9 forms should be kept in a separate file.

Exhibit 1-10
Review of Six Central Office Personnel Files (Certified Personnel)

| Item | Number of Teacher Files with Item (Out of Four) Plus Two Support Staff |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Teaching Certificate | 4 |
| Teachers Contract | 4 |
| Transcript | 4 |
| Loyalty Oath | 6 |
| W-4 | 6 |
| Insurance | 6 |
| Background Check | 4 |
| Resume | 4 |
| Application | 6 |
| I-9 | 4 |

Source: OEQA Archived Sample Analysis of Personnel Files

The Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) provides organizations with numerous guidelines related to human resources management. SHRM stated that only certain items should be maintained in an employee's personnel file:

- documents used in recruiting, screening, and hiring job candidates (applications, resumes, and education transcripts);
- job descriptions;
- written documentation of actions taken during employment;
- pay and compensation information;
- education and training records;

- receipts for handbooks, employment-at-will disclaimers, and policies;
- documentation of employee performance, including items of recognition and regular performance appraisals;
- warnings, counseling, and disciplinary actions; and
- documents regarding termination of employment.¹⁸

Also, per SHRM, medical and insurance records should not be kept in personnel files because of confidentiality concerns. Likewise, information obtained from background investigations should not be kept in personnel files. Such information should instead be kept in a separate file to which few staff members have access.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

FINDING 1-11

Several OKPS districts have limited or no job descriptions on file for all support positions. Having specific job descriptions helps the district set clear expectations, avoid duplication of effort, and strengthen accountability for job performance. Due to size many districts do not have the capacity or personnel, such as an administrative assistant for personnel operations, to maintain or ensure there are job descriptions on all support positions.

RECOMMENDATION

School leaders should develop and or update job descriptions for all support positions that set clear expectations, avoid duplication of effort, and strengthen accountability.

The district leaders could investigate to see if there are any peer districts that have on file job descriptions that could serve as a resource for the development of their own job descriptions. Once the district has obtained such a resource then they should ensure that all job descriptions are current and are written in a consistent format. To ensure maintenance and sustainability of the newly created job descriptions the district may appoint an administrative assistant to work with supervisors to review and revise the descriptions as needed, and to generate descriptions for newly created positions.

Job descriptions provide employees with a clear understanding of the district's expectations. In addition, job descriptions provide documentation that allows the district to reassign responsibilities, adapt positions to meet district needs, and provide accommodation. Providing employees with a copy of the job description helps clarify roles and responsibilities and supports accuracy in the evaluation of job performance.

¹⁸ www.shrm.org

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

FINDING 1-12

It has been noted through some reviews of OKPS districts that not all have a systematic process for making staffing decisions. Without a clear decision-making process, staffing decisions are made without consideration of the impact to programs and services. For example, because there was no process in place many districts reduced staffing in critical areas such as special education, library media, and secondary courses that were taught online.

In interviews with consulting teams, the superintendents and principals of schools who had made staff reductions shared that these actions were made due to financial cutbacks in state funding and the decision to discontinue courses that were delivered through a virtual school program. Many superintendents felt there were no clear guidelines for guidelines making staffing decisions or for studying the potential impact of those decisions. As a result, in many of the school districts, teachers did not understand the staffing reassignments and reductions.

In interviews and focus groups, across the state it was shared that providing quality elective courses was challenging for districts that are rural and small. Reductions in staff can impact the ability of a district to offer electives. Examples that were noted in several reviews included the reduction of library media specialist positions; the elimination of 1.0 FTE position that provided two middle school language arts classes; computer electives; and special education services were impacted.

Districts often develop an objective process for determining staffing needs, reductions, and reassignments to ensure that the best possible decisions are made toward accomplishing district goals. It was noted in one performance review of an OKPS district¹⁹ that the superintendent works with principals and teachers in developing district priorities and establishing options for budget reductions. The superintendent meets monthly with all district staff to discuss priorities and financial status. During times of financial constraint, the meetings generate options for staffing reductions or reassignments that have the least impact on student learning. This helps all staff understand how staffing and budget decisions are made, and that objective processes are used to minimize the negative impact of reductions on district programs and services.

RECOMMENDATION

Develop a systematic process for making staffing decisions that includes careful consideration of the impact to district programs and services.

Superintendents should work with their principals and a representative group of teachers to develop a process for making staffing decisions. Consideration should be given to a workforce planning process such as that suggested by the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) (<http://www.napawash.org>). According to NAPA, workforce planning is a continuous

¹⁹ Hinton Public Schools

process that ensures an organization has the right people in the right positions to address goals, support programs, and services. Such planning for the district would involve:

- A systematic process that is integrated, methodical, and ongoing.
- The identification of the human resource needs required to meet organization goals.
- A determination of the number and skills of needed teachers and support staff, and where and when they will be needed.
- The development of strategies to attract and retain the number and types of staff needed to meet the goals of the district in addressing student learning.

As part of the process, the superintendent should consider engaging all staff in identifying needs and generating options that best aligns staffing resources to district goals. This methodical review should include a critical look at course offerings, scheduling, class size, and staff skills and credentials. Options and priorities should reflect the best possible solutions for addressing student programs and services within the existing financial constraints. The superintendent should consider a communication model similar to that used in Hinton Public Schools as a component of the workforce planning process.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

Personnel Evaluation

Teacher/Leader

In May 2010, the Oklahoma legislature passed Senate Bill 2033. This legislation created the statewide teacher and leader effectiveness evaluation system (TLE) and set policy for evaluation, pay, retention and dismissal of teachers in the state. Originally, this law required that teachers receive evaluation ratings based on a qualitative component (50 percent observations) and a quantitative component (35 percent value-added scores and 15 percent other student academic measures). The legislature intended for the combination of these two components to produce a summative rating of superior, highly effective, effective, needs improvement or ineffective for each teacher²⁰.

In accordance with state law, the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) began piloting TLE in districts in the 2012-13 school year, with the goal of full implementation by 2016-17. TLE implementation was controversial. Significant opposition to value-added measures and student learning objectives (SLOS), which comprised the quantitative component, created sufficient public pressure to spur a legislative response. In May 2016, the Oklahoma Legislature passed House Bill 2957 to revise Senate Bill 2033. Among the most significant changes, the legislature eliminated the requirement for a quantitative component in TLE, while still allowing

²⁰ SREB Educator Effectiveness Progress Monitoring Report Oklahoma Fall 2016

districts to continue using this component, should they choose to do so, at their own expense.²¹ The new law also called for OSDE to work with districts to establish individualized professional development programs for teachers, including an annual professional development growth goal tailored to each teacher’s needs. OSDE piloted the growth goal in the 2017-18 school year and integrated it into TLE in 2018-19 school year.

FINDING 1-13

There were 20 school districts that received a full Oklahoma School Performance Review within a five-year period, which included early fall of 2012 to the spring of 2017. Of those 20 districts, 19 school district staffs were asked if they agreed or disagreed with this statement: “*I received adequate training on the TLE evaluation instrument our district has adopted*”. Only six districts (31 percent) had 71 percent or higher of teachers who agreed they had received adequate training on their district’s adopted TLE evaluation system regardless of the year surveyed.

Exhibit 1-11 provides the percentage of surveyed staff from 19 school districts over a five-year period who agreed that they had received adequate training on the TLE evaluation system their district had adopted. Survey results indicated that 13 of the 19 districts (68 percent) had less than 71 percent of staffs agreeing that they had adequate training on their districts adopted TLE evaluation system.

Exhibit 1-11

Districts’ Staff Responses to the Adopted TLE Evaluation System Training (2012-2017)

| Average percentage of Staff Surveyed that agreed they had received adequate training on the district’s adopted TLE Evaluation System 2012-2017 | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Year Surveyed | Number of Districts Within Each Percentage Range | | | |
| | 40%- 55% | 56%-70% | 71%-89% | 90%-100% |
| 2012 | 1 | | | 1 |
| 2013 | | 1 | 1 | |
| 2014 | 1 | | 1 | 1 |
| 2015 | 1 | 4 | 1 | |
| 2016 | 2 | 1 | 1 | |
| 2017 | 1 | 1 | | |
| Total | 6 | 7 | 4 | 2 |

Source: OEQA Archived Survey Results 2012-2017

Surprisingly, the percentage of teachers agreeing that the TLE trainings were adequate did not increase into the fourth and fifth years of the evaluation system’s implementation. The results of OEQA’s survey responses correspond with findings from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Educator Effectiveness Progress Monitoring Report (2016). The report was the result of reviewing several documents including TLE ratings and conducting multiple interviews/focus groups. Focus group/interview outcomes revealed an agreement that evaluator trainings conducted for both TLE evaluation models lacked in quality. The report recommended that OSDE take a stronger role in quality control for all TLE trainings.

²¹Ibid

RECOMMENDATION**Solicit feedback from teachers and leaders to determine the adopted evaluation system's progress and identify ways to improve implementation and training.**

Districts should ensure the following guidelines are considered when incorporating the above recommendation:

- Successful implementation requires a clear and consistent message about the evaluation system's purpose.
- Dedicate significant staff capacity to plan for and manage the various components of an evaluation system.
- Set aside regular time to reflect on the evaluation system's progress and identify ways to improve.
- No design or implementation plan will be perfect. Consistent reflection and redesign are key to improving evaluation and, consequently, teacher / leader quality over time.
- Communicate regularly with stakeholders for their feedback

With the new focus on Professional Learning (PL) as part of the TLE evaluation process, more emphasis has been placed on the critical aspect of professional development and its relationship to teacher/leader effectiveness. Districts should ensure that struggling teachers or novice teachers include further TLE training as part of their PL plan. Schools should also closely monitor teacher observations and intervene when school leaders need additional support in conducting teacher evaluations.

Support Staff Evaluations**FINDING 1-14**

Many districts reviewed did not have a consistent personnel evaluation system for support staff. This occurred in some districts even though the evaluation was required by policy. Thus, employees do not receive consistent feedback to enhance their performance and have limited opportunity for formal supervision. **Exhibit 1-12** is a sample support staff evaluation format utilized by school districts serving 500 plus students.

Exhibit 1-12
Example Support Staff Evaluation Format

| Performance Criteria | Appropriate Level of Performance | Room for Growth | Unsatisfactory |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Attendance | | | |
| Job Knowledge | | | |
| Quality of Work | | | |
| Attitude | | | |
| Dependability | | | |
| Conduct | | | |
| Teamwork | | | |
| Neatness | | | |
| Do you recommend remediation? | Yes/No | | |
| I agree with the above evaluation | Check | | |
| I disagree with the above evaluation | Check | | |
| I request a job targets report for the Needs to Improve ratings checked above. | Check | | |
| Two week notice statement | | | |
| Signature lines | | | |

Source: OEQA Archived Exhibit

RECOMMENDATION

Develop and implement an evaluation system, with input from support staff, which will include the use of the approved evaluation forms and a regular schedule for performance appraisal to maintain and enhance employee performance.

Districts should provide a sample form to support staff and take their input on potential changes. There must be some commonality across all positions.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

Professional Development

While the development of a competent and certified support personnel staff is often considered a human resource function, the professional development of personnel is also a critical component of instructional delivery and school improvement. Professional development programs enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators to improve student learning. The base of knowledge in education is growing so rapidly in every academic discipline that educators must stay current and develop new expertise. Effective school districts provide ongoing learning opportunities for all educators. The SDE standards specify that professional development should increase competencies in core curricular areas.

Learning Forward has established standards for quality professional learning that increase educator effectiveness and results for all students. These standards characterize quality professional learning as that which:

- occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment;
- requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning;
- integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes;
- aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards;
- requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning;
- uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning; and
- applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.

FINDING 1-15

It was noted in several district reviews that there was either no plan or not a clearly-articulated plan that described a professional development program for administrators and teachers that included detailed objectives and multi-year strategies for accomplishing them. This resulted in fragmented implementation of school improvement initiatives and no strategic plan for sustainability.

Many districts had initiated some effort in this area of PD. Such efforts in their professional development plans consisted of a document that outlined standards for high-quality professional development and a list of statements that described parameters for professional development activities. The document, however, was not a plan but instead a generic framework for what to consider with respect to providing professional development. In several interviews the chair of the professional development committee, would not have a written plan or document that described the district's goals and objectives for professional development program, the supporting implementation strategies and timelines, and monitoring and evaluation processes.

A few districts had an emphasis on professional development with a focus on principles and strategies that aligned to an adopted model. For example, two districts focus was to align to the International Center for Leadership Education (ICLE), which emphasized rigor, relevance, and relationships. Those districts used the Model Schools Conference, which showcased ICLE districts as its primary professional development resource for school improvement. According to the superintendents, this was an expensive approach, with an estimated cost of about \$2,000 per person. After three years, based upon one superintendent's estimate, the district had spent approximately \$130,000 to develop a critical mass of 65 teachers and administrators who had

experienced the Model Schools Conference. Although the model seemed to spark enthusiasm among the staff and point toward possible impact/embeddedness, there was no PD plan to support the investment. This seemed to be a pattern in many districts regardless of the school improvement models that were adopted.

Although some districts have identified an initiative that best addresses their needs based upon data, the consulting team noted the districts had not developed a strategic plan to implement what the teachers and administrators had learned or were continuing to learn due to the adopted school improvement initiative. When asked about a plan for implementing what had been learned at various conferences supporting districts' adopted school improvement models, principals and teachers stated they did not know of one. The review team discovered there was no planning process that:

- identified clear target objectives and outcomes to implement what has been learned through exposure to previous funded professional development;
- Develop a professional development calendar and schedule that allows time for practice, feedback, and collaboration.
- developed tiered programs of professional development to implement the core principles touted by the school improvement model such as the ICLE's focus on rigor, relevance, and relationships;
- incorporated a well-defined professional development program for technology integration based upon the years of experience with various providers such as the K20 Center through the Gear Up grant and OK-ACTS funding, which was tiered to address different levels of learning or skills;
- outlined multi-year implementation timelines to address sustainability and integration of the core principles and strategies of any learning models adopted such as ICLE;
- established a process for aligning and integrating other supporting initiatives with the district focus; and
- provided a framework for progress monitoring, coaching support, and evaluation processes.

During many interviews with district professional development committee members, the consulting team would discover, in some instances, that the committee met only to plan the teacher of the year selection and recognition event. There was no planning discussions involving the professional development committee, nor was there a planning process that engaged the staff as a group to develop a vision and strategies for implementing and connecting the professional development initiatives.

The K20 Center, which many Oklahoma Public School districts have partnered with in the past or presently, offers a best-practice-based structure for developing sustainability. The K20

framework addresses five interrelated phases for transforming schools and districts. These phases are: Leaders Learning, Whole-School Learning, Teacher Learning, Student Learning, and University Learning and Partnerships. These interrelated phases offer a framework for developing a comprehensive professional development plan.²²

RECOMMENDATION

Create a clearly-articulated plan or schematic that describes the professional development program for teachers, including detailed objectives and multi-year strategies in order to reduce fragmentation and increase teacher understanding of the initiatives designed to improve student achievement.

The superintendent, the district leadership team, and professional development committee members should act as a strategic planning team to coordinate the development of a comprehensive, multi-year plan that will focus professional development strategies on implementing the core principles of adopted learning models and connect to any other district initiatives. The planning team should explore the planning considerations listed above and review other districts' or states' approaches to planning. The team might use the Killion and Roy's Backmapping Model for Planning Results-Based Professional Learning. Killion and Roy observe that "School improvement plans identify student learning goals, while professional learning helps educators acquire the knowledge and skills to help students meet those goals".²³

Connections should also be made to teacher and leader effectiveness (TLE) domains; this will assist teachers in understanding how the professional development relates to what is expected of them. Without being able to make these connections, the staff may experience a sense of overload by being introduced to a number of fragmented strategies, which impedes implementation.

The professional development schematic can be synthesized into a formal professional development plan. OSDE crafted in 2012 the Oklahoma Ways to Improve School Effectiveness (WISE) Planning Tool. Although it is no longer actively being used at the state level, the tool is still conducive with its *WISE* performance indicators in providing guidance for professional development planning. Key indicators include²⁴:

- school leadership provides adequate time and appropriate fiscal resources for professional development;
- school planning teams use goals for student learning to determine professional development priorities for all staff;
- school planning teams design professional development that has a direct connection to the analysis of student achievement data;

²² www.k20center.ou.edu

²³ <https://learningforward.org/docs/jsd-october-2012/killion335.pdf>

²⁴ <https://sde.ok.gov/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/WISE-PerfIndicators.pdf>

- all staff (principals, teachers, and paraprofessionals) participates in professional development that is high quality, ongoing, and job-embedded. School leadership implements a process for all staff to participate in reflective practice and collect school-wide data to plan professional development; and
- all teachers participate in professional development that increases knowledge of child and adolescent development, encourages the use of effective pedagogy, supports techniques for increasing student motivation and addresses the diverse needs of students.

A cohesive professional development plan targets the best practices of effective schools, improves teacher instruction in content areas, and is based on the most robust research. Effective professional development plans create a road map for comprehensive school improvement and increased student achievement. Learning Forward released its research-based standards for professional development in 2012 and presented in **Exhibit 1-13**.

Exhibit 1-13
Learning Forward Professional Learning Standards

| Standard | Rationale |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Learning Communities | Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment. |
| Leadership | Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning. |
| Resources | Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning. |
| Data | Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning. |
| Learning Designs | Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes. |
| Implementation | Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change. |
| Outcomes | Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards. |

Source: www.learningforward.org, Archived

McREL's Professional Development Analysis, a research synthesis compiled in 2005, states that changes in instructional practice that impact student achievement depend on sustained and targeted professional development focused on specific content knowledge. Professional development that positively affects learning is of considerable duration, focused on specific content, characterized by collective participation, coherent, and infused with active learning. A fragmented program for professional development does not support improved student achievement across the district. The NSDC research shows that the length, focus, and quality of professional development greatly impacts teaching quality and student achievement. It was found that when teachers have an average of 49 hours a year in a specific curriculum focus, student achievement can increase as much as 21 percentile points.

As any district moves toward a more comprehensive professional development plan, careful analysis of the adopted Evaluation System's evaluation reports should assist the district with offering specific teachers targeted professional development to improve their classroom effectiveness. Additionally, any resulting schematics and plans should be accompanied by a process for evaluating the professional development objectives. The "if it sticks around" criterion is not sufficient to determine impact on student performance. Any schematics, plans, and evaluations should be discussed and updated on a periodic basis. Such updates keep the overall plan aligned to what is actually being done to improve teaching and learning.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources. If the superintendent should decide a facilitator would be helpful to the planning process, the resources would become available by reallocating funds currently earmarked for conference attendance.

FINDING 1-16

It was not uncommon over the past 15 years for consulting teams to see districts not actively providing a comprehensive job-specific professional development program for all support staff categories. Without a training/development program, districts were not able to fully develop and maintain the desired competency and sense of professionalism among support staff. This is critical for all districts whether there are 100 support personnel or 10.

Support staff include teacher assistants, child nutrition personnel, custodial and maintenance staff, technology assistants, and clerical/financial personnel. In focus group discussions support personnel representatives reported that some employees, such as special education assistants, custodians, maintenance staff, child nutrition staff, and payroll/finance staff receive training. Those in other staff categories expressed interest and need for opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge. Teacher assistants indicated they are only sporadically included in teacher professional development activities and did not participate in professional development sessions. The focus group representatives voiced interest in learning about instructional strategies first hand. Early childhood assistants expressed a need for training in child development and strategies for working with children in Pre-K and kindergarten. With professional development, they felt they could better serve students.

The non-instructional support staff members also expressed an interest in being included in appropriate district professional development as well as training that is specifically targeted to their job position. The technology support assistants stated that they needed an ongoing training program.

Another job category of support staff, the secretaries, indicated that they did not participate in any activities on professional development days, which does give them time to catch up on their work. The only professional development secretaries have received comes occasionally through outside resources such as the career technology centers.

RECOMMENDATION

Design and implement a professional development program for all support staff categories that includes job-specific training as well as participation in the professional development for certified staff as appropriate.

Superintendents should work with the professional development committee to include support personnel representatives on an ad hoc basis for the purpose of planning a professional development program for all support staff categories. The first task of the committee should be to review the current professional development schedule for certified staff to determine the workshops that are appropriate for all support staff and those that are unique to the needs of classroom teaching assistants. Efforts should also be made to adjust funding resources to accommodate the addition of support personnel to the participant list for certified teacher workshops.

The committee should also address the specific needs of the IT assistants for job-specific training that will help them assist teachers in integrating technology and increase their ability to effectively troubleshoot problems that staff may have in the classroom or labs. Another aspect of technology professional development for assistants should include instructional technology training for all teacher assistants and paraprofessionals and special programming for secretarial staff.

For support personnel in non-classroom performance categories as well as instructional staff, the committee should explore training options available through outside resources such as surrounding districts or vendor-sponsored training. Surrounding districts might also be willing to partner with a district in order to send some of their special education staff to a well-established, professional development program. A crisis-prevention program such as CPI is often cost prohibitive for smaller districts, so access to this program for special education teachers would be attractive to other districts. By partnering with outside districts, a district could also pay a registration fee for staff to attend. State vendors for supplies and equipment are also sources of possible training options that are free or at minimal cost.

In planning professional development for support personnel, the committee should review federal program and grant funds to identify possible funding resources. The committee may be able to identify resources by adjusting Title I and Title II budgets.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

FINDING 1-17

Most districts reviewed did not have a cadre of trained teacher leaders to serve as coaches to support and sustain district efforts to increase student achievement. Failure to develop the capacity of teacher leaders forces the district to rely on outside consultants or one staff member to provide coaching or follow-up to support teachers as they use new strategies.

The best practice is teachers leading teachers, coaching and learning from one another. A cadre can be selected for special training and then train other teachers in the selected strategy while continuing to provide onsite support for teachers as they implement new strategies. Embedding this in professional learning communities can be an effective strategy.

These practices require the availability of more time for teacher collaboration. Interviews and focus groups suggest that teachers would like to have more time to collaborate, but feel slightly overwhelmed by all of the changes, teaching schedules and other related responsibilities that prevent collaboration.

RECOMMENDATION

Utilize teacher leaders in coaching others through new initiatives, adding more collaboration time, and developing professional learning communities.

The superintendent should appoint a committee to study the issues involved and to draft a three-year plan of implementation. This plan should evaluate the current efforts, plan for where the district wants to be in three years, and then develop goals and objectives to get there. There may need to be sub-committees studying each area of coaching, collaboration time development, and professional learning communities.

FISCAL IMPACT

To move the district in the direction of implementation, some training funds can be directed to these specific efforts. The consulting team believes that \$1,000 annually is a reasonable amount and enough to sustain the effort across five years.

| Recommendation | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 | 2022-23 | 2023-24 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Commit to high quality professional development utilizing a teacher trainer cadre model. | (\$1,000) | (\$1,000) | (\$1,000) | (\$1,000) | (\$1,000) |

FINDING 1-18

Written personnel procedures for the recruitment, selection, retention, and termination of certified and support staff were either partially implemented or non-existent in districts reviewed; however, most all districts had policies and procedures for termination of staff. In interviews with various administrative personnel, many stated there were no written documents outlining personnel procedures. Some had board policies that addressed personnel procedures such as posting vacancies, interview processes, and other personnel related decisions. The negotiated agreements with certified and support personnel notably had limited references to personnel procedures. The lack of consistent procedures impedes districts in efforts to select and retain qualified staff, resulting in unfair employment practices and leaving districts without necessary documentation to address employment concerns.

As an example of this problem, one district had procedures for recruiting and selecting teachers and support staff, but these procedures were not in writing and did not align to board policy. A common pattern noted when consulting teams interviewed principals and supervisors, was the mixed interpretations of the employment procedures thus, supervisors were not following an aligned protocol for interviewing, hiring, and recruiting. Some districts' administrators expressed confusion over what had been past practice and what the expectations were at the time. Principals also indicated confusion over who hires and who supervises support personnel such as the custodians at the school sites. Due to no structure in the employment procedures some principals stated they destroyed applications of those not hired for a position, which automatically eliminated an applicant pool that should be maintained by the district. Also, there would be no documentation available to show the district used fair employment practices.

Several superintendents stated that there was no specific recruitment plan for their district. The most prevalent practice among districts was for principals to visit annual job fairs at the nearest teacher colleges. However, in this current era of teacher shortages, this practice alone is insufficient in recruiting quality applicants for vacant teaching positions.

RECOMMENDATION

Districts should develop written personnel procedures for the recruitment, selection, retention, and termination of certified and support staff to ensure there is a highly qualified staff and all employment practices meet fair employment standards.

Superintendents and administrative staffs should review existing employment practices and determine a process for developing written procedures. The principals and support employee supervisors should be involved in finalizing the written procedures. Procedures should address recruitment, selection, retention, termination, and ways to document and monitor consistent implementation of all procedures.

Additionally, the administrative team should review all board policy, personnel related requirements in negotiated agreements (if there are any) and seek the advice of an attorney in developing formal written employment procedures. All procedures should be in keeping with all state and federal laws and clearly delineated for the employment of both certified and support. Policies and procedures should not be contradictory. Once the procedures are written and

approved, principals and supervisors must receive training and procedures should be monitored for compliance.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

E. COMMUNITY AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT

School districts are a vital part of communities, often associated with a community's identity, sense of pride, and quality of life. This is especially true in smaller communities. In order to strengthen this role, school districts should develop effective communications and community involvement programs that lead to a more informed and engaged staff and community. Research demonstrates that community outreach benefits both the community and the schools.

Effective community involvement programs should highlight the unique characteristics of the school district and the community. These programs can substantially affect citizen perceptions of and engage the community with the school system. Effective programs will rally public support and involvement. They can result in parent and community volunteers, public participation in the decision-making processes that affect the schools (e.g. bond and board elections), and productive business and community alliances.

Exhibit 1-14 reflects activities of community involvement that have been mentioned in documents, interviews and focus groups in several reviews. One district set a goal of maintaining at least 70 percent of the ongoing partnership list with additionally at least four individual businesses.

Exhibit 1-14
Sample Community Involvement and Partnership List

| Community Alliances |
|--------------------------------------------------|
| Athletic, Band, FFA - Booster Clubs |
| Rotary Club, Masonic Lodge, etc. |
| Chamber of Commerce |
| Area Hospital(s) |
| Fire Department |
| Police Department |
| Ministerial Alliance |
| Little League Associations |
| Newspapers |
| Wal-Mart |
| Sonic |
| Local Banks |
| Various Local Businesses unique to the community |

Source: OEQA Archived Exhibit

FINDING 1-19

Interviews, survey results, and focus group comments have shown concern regarding a lack of appropriate parental involvement. Districts often do not use arrangements other than required federal committees to expand the active engagement of parents causing limited involvement and input from critical parent groups.

A plethora of research studies²⁵ have found that school improvement efforts are more sustainable when parents and community members understand them and have been involved in the decision-making process. Apathy, distrust, and confrontation are often manifested when the community is not involved in the decisions that affect the education of their children. **Exhibit 1-15** reflects survey responses from a sampling of archived staff surveys from 2012-2017 as regarding school involvement. The survey results shown indicate that while 86 percent of parents feel welcome at

²⁵ <http://www.sedl.org/pubs/family29/welcome.html>

their child’s school, 40 percent do not feel that they play an active role in decision-making.

**Exhibit 1-15
Parent Survey Responses Regarding School Involvement**

| Survey Statement | Agree | No Opinion | Disagree |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|------------|----------|
| School board members listen to the opinions and desires of parents and community members. | 43% | 38% | 18% |
| Parents play an active role in decision-making in our schools. | 40% | 26% | 35% |
| I feel welcome at my child’s school. | 86% | 6% | 11% |
| I receive enough information from the district regarding academic expectations for my child (i.e. student testing, retention, etc.). | 62% | 13% | 25% |

Source: OEQA Sampling from Archived District Surveys 2012-2017

With diverse student populations, parent involvement presents challenges as schools strive to create welcoming environments and outreach programs that involve parents in their communities. Studies show that when parents and community members are engaged with and in schools, student performance improves, attendance increases, and dropout rates decrease.

The *Dual Capacity – Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships* offered by the U.S. Department of Education builds on existing research and suggests that partnerships between home and school can develop only if both families and staff have the prerequisite capacity to engage in partnership. Research suggests that families who are trained to be more active in their children’s schools are often met by an unwelcoming school climate and resistance from staff to their efforts for more active engagement. To increase authentic parent engagement, programs directed at improving family engagement must focus on building the capacities of both staff and families to engage in partnerships.

Exhibit 1-16 provides an examination of the average percentage of parents attending parent-teacher conferences during the 2016-17 school year. The percentages are arranged using OEQA’s Community Group Model. As stated earlier in this chapter Community Group Model is based on a district’s ADM and the percentage of students who qualify for the Free and Reduced-price lunch program. The Oklahoma School Performance Review (OSPR) program has reviewed one or more schools in each of these Community Groups over the past 15 years. The exhibit shows within each Community Group’s ADM coupling (e.g. B1-B2; C1-C2), the Community Group with a “2” designation (higher poverty) have less percentage of parents attending parent-teacher conferences compared to Community Groups designated with a “1” (lower poverty).

Exhibit 1-16
Comparison of Parent/Teacher Conference Attendance by Community Groups

| Entity | 2016-17 |
|--------------------|------------|
| Community Group B1 | 76% |
| Community Group B2 | 75% |
| Community Group C1 | 79% |
| Community Group C2 | 70% |
| Community Group D1 | 76% |
| Community Group D2 | 72% |
| Community Group E1 | 69% |
| Community Group E2 | 67% |
| Community Group F1 | 76% |
| Community Group F2 | 70% |
| Community Group G1 | 82% |
| Community Group G2 | 71% |
| Community Group H1 | 85% |
| Community Group H2 | 71% |
| State | 73% |

Source: OEQA, Profiles Database 2017

RECOMMENDATION

Through board of education policy, adopt a unified approach that encourages parent involvement in decision-making and engagement in the schools.

Superintendents should convene a committee of parents, administrators and teachers to begin exploring ways to increase the involvement of all parents. As part of the initial discussions, the committee should review district data and use the SEDL work paper referenced above, and the U.S. Department of Education as study guides.

In addition to the study guides and case studies, the committee can review the results for the last three years of the annual district surveys as well as the survey results available in this report. Principals should provide data on the number of volunteers in their respective schools, and the disaggregated data by subgroups on the number of parents attending parent conferences for the past three school years.

To expand the conversation beyond the committee, superintendents should involve their committee in developing plans to engage focus groups to provide broader input. The committee should identify informal meeting settings, which should take place in the community, outside the school setting.

In determining the composition of the focus group(s), the superintendent can facilitate this process by having each person on the planning team develop a socio-gram map of who in the diverse parent community that he/she knows. With the individual socio-grams completed, the group shares the maps to reduce overlap. This will produce a list of people that each committee member could potentially bring to a focus meeting.

The team should establish a schedule of focus groups around team members' schedules since they will be responsible for inviting their personal contacts to the meeting. The focus groups should discuss ideas and strategies for increasing engagement of staff and parents in an active partnership for school improvement by expanding the collective capacity. Focus groups should also include the opportunity for broad-based, authentic planning to expand the needs assessment and contribute to planning the services needed.

Specifically, the strategies could include any of the following:

- develop a district advisory committee comprised of parents and community representation and schedule periodic meetings to discuss and receive input on district issues;
- make greater use of specific surveys to solicit community input;
- when making policy decisions or contemplating district initiatives, put them out informatively and solicit input from the community and parents;
- develop parent teacher organizations at each school;
- develop board policy that is designed to set a minimum requirement for principals on soliciting input from their parents;
- develop school level parent advisory committees;
- periodically do a community focus group on school issues;
- develop a long-range strategic planning committee that includes parents and the community;
- develop a standard operating principle for administration and teacher communication with parents. For example, require that teacher and principal web pages must be updated weekly and/or that certain committees must always include a parent representative; and
- add a comment and feedback loop to the district web page.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

FINDING 1-20

Many districts utilize school volunteers as reading partners, lunch buddies, classroom parents, substituting, and for help with special events. It has been noted in several reviews that many districts, specifically those in high poverty or in rural areas, were lacking a formal or systematic volunteer program to leverage the talents that parents and families might bring to a school setting.

Exhibit 1-17 provides information on volunteer hours per student during the 2016-17 school year as presented in Community Groups B1-H2. As aforementioned the Oklahoma School

Performance Review program has reviewed one or more schools in each of these Community Groups over the past 15 years. The exhibit shows the Community Groups with a “2” designation, which represents highest level of poverty, have fewer volunteer hours per student compared to the Community Groups designated with a “1” – lowest level of poverty (e.g. B1-B2; C1-C2).

Exhibit 1-17
Community Group Comparison of Volunteer Hours per Student

| Entity | 2016-17 |
|--------------------|------------|
| Community Group B1 | 5.3 |
| Community Group B2 | 1.9 |
| Community Group C1 | 3.5 |
| Community Group C2 | 3.2 |
| Community Group D1 | 4.8 |
| Community Group D2 | 2.2 |
| Community Group E1 | 2.1 |
| Community Group E2 | 1.6 |
| Community Group F1 | 2.1 |
| Community Group F2 | 1.7 |
| Community Group G1 | 3.2 |
| Community Group G2 | 2.8 |
| Community Group H1 | 4.7 |
| Community Group H2 | 3.2 |
| State | 3.1 |

Source: OEQA, Profiles Database 2017

Without district guidelines and emphasis, volunteering can quickly be lost in all the other pressures that schools face. The National Parent Teacher Association’s *Seven Steps to a Successful Volunteer Program*²⁶ provides useful information for creating and maintaining an active school volunteer program. The steps are:

- assessing the volunteer needs each school has;
- working with and training principals, teachers, and school staff on using and supervising volunteers effectively;
- setting goals and objectives for volunteer assignments;
- recruiting volunteers;
- training and orienting volunteers;
- training and recognizing volunteers; and
- evaluating volunteer performance and program success.

²⁶ <http://www.pta.org/3549.htm>

RECOMMENDATION

Invest time and effort in developing a systematic volunteer program.

Districts should study and develop a volunteer program that promotes parent and community involvement in the district, with specific goals in leveraging volunteer efforts toward improved academic outcomes. Superintendents should gather and task a committee with researching successful small school volunteer programs and then develop its own volunteer program. It should include administrators, teachers, parents, and community members.

The program can include classroom and school grounds volunteers, formal development of parent/teacher organizations, and programs that are aimed at involving specific groups like grandparents. It should seek consistency in policies and practices throughout the district and should also be formally approved by the school board.

The committee should be flexible in thinking of opportunities for parents, grandparents, and guardians to be involved outside the traditional concept of classroom volunteering, and should focus on ways they can help support academic outcomes. To allay fears regarding the quality of volunteers, the program should provide training to the volunteers so that expectations are understood. The parent input provided through the surveys should be used as a starting point to inform district leaders of parent priorities and concerns.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.

F. COMMUNICATIONS/PUBLIC RELATIONS

The primary role of communications in a school district is to convey a message and image consistent with the school board policies that are implemented through procedures established by the superintendent and district staff. Critical components of communications include strategies for externally communicating with the community and internally communicating within the school district.

FINDING 1-21

Many districts have made substantial improvements to their websites with the advancements in technology. Most have served quite sufficiently as an effective communication tool with parents, students, staff, and the community. In some cases, however, districts have not maintained those improvements or included a periodic evaluation/monitoring of the effectiveness of the website or its relevancy over time. As a result, the website may no longer be dependable in keeping parents informed and involved with their child's learning.

In one district the Parent-Teacher Organization's (PTO) representatives commented on the use of their district's website and parent portal as communication tools yet they indicated the website's utility was negated because they did not find it to be user-friendly. A common wish expressed in

the parent/community focus groups was to be able to provide feedback to the administrators as to how their school district’s website could be improved.

Exhibit 1-18, reflects survey responses from a sampling of archived surveys from 2012-2017 related to perspectives of district websites. Results from the student surveys indicate that 42 percent of students believe the district’s website is not a useful tool for them. A slim majority of parents, 60 percent, agree that the website is a useful tool for them and/or their child. In contrast, most staff, 78 percent, think their district’s website was a useful tool for staff, parents, and students in general.

Exhibit 1-18
Survey Responses Regarding District Website

| Survey Group | Survey Statement | Agree | No Opinion | Disagree |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|------------|----------|
| Staff | The district website is a useful tool for staff, parents, and students. | 78% | 12% | 11% |
| Parent | The district website is a useful tool for me and/or my child. | 60% | 19% | 21% |
| Student | I regularly use the school district website. | 42% | 29% | 29% |

Source: OEQA Sampling from Archived District Surveys 2012-2017

RECOMMENDATION

Monitor the use and increase the effectiveness of the district website, teacher web pages, and parent portal as tools to inform and involve parents.

District superintendents should convene a task force comprised of the technology personnel (formal and informal), teachers, principals, and PTO representatives to plan for the effective use of district technology to engage and inform parents. As a first step, the task force should determine the current status of the effectiveness of the website and parent/student portals as communication tools. Parent and teacher focus groups should be conducted at each school site, along with surveys, to obtain feedback and suggestions. Based on the data collected, the task force should develop a plan that would increase the effectiveness of the website, portal, and other technology as tools for parent communication.

The plan should include specified actions, designated responsibilities and expectations, timelines, and methods for monitoring and ongoing evaluation. Attention should be given to making the website more user friendly and the parent/student portals more regularly updated. The plan should include training for both teachers and parents. Teachers may need support in the effective use of the web pages and portal to engage parents. Parents should be provided opportunities for support and training to access and use the portal.

FISCAL IMPACT

This recommendation can be implemented with existing resources.