



WISCONSIN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BOARDS

*Fostering effective school board
practices for student success.*

PAR Services Report

prepared for

Green Lake School District

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Provided by:

PAR Program Services



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Introduction

The Green Lake School District engaged PAR Program staff of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB) to assist the district with an Administrative Staffing Study. An administrative staffing study was identified as one of the district's goals for the 2011-12 school year. More specifically, WASB PAR consultants were directed to analyze the effectiveness of the current administrative team including an analysis of an option to reduce administrative staffing. It is helpful and necessary at times to analyze operational activities and internal systems with a vision to improve the local school district from a non-district employee perspective.

Protocol of Study

In order to conduct this study, several on-site interviews of administrative staff and school board members were held. PAR consultants believe there were enough interviews to verify the differing points of view that have provided directional data for this report. The school district leadership staff was asked to provide some basic background information on school board policies, enrollment, and job descriptions to assist in this report preparation. The personal interviews were designed to solicit information on the various individual positions leading up to the current situation, correlate the opinions of individuals, and to forge a resolution to the issues in existence in the school district. It was hoped that any unique perspectives would be identified during the respective interviews and review of information. All individuals were most cooperative during the interviews.



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Summary of Observations

It is important for the PAR team to set the context of this study by saying that overall the Green Lake School District appears to be functioning well. The school board is committed to improving the operational effectiveness of the district and is open to learning more about their responsibilities as board members. Administrative staff state in their responses to what they liked about their jobs was that they most enjoyed working with students. That was reflected also in their concerns to keep students safe and to provide them with an education that will prepare them for the future once they graduate. District finances appear to be in order and the district has undertaken energy efficiency measures that should pay dividends in reducing future energy costs. To summarize it is appropriate not to overlook the many positive aspects of the Green Lake School District.

However, it is also appropriate to note that the Green Lake School District is experiencing a number of challenges, as are most school districts in the state of Wisconsin. A struggling national and state economy has put additional pressure on school districts to not only be more cost conscious but also to increase student learning. The WASB PAR study is a reflection of the district's desire to ensure that the administrative dimension of the district's operations is appropriately staffed and effective in its performance.



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Research/Analysis

It has been said that “Problem solving is problem finding.” In many cases a problem is left unresolved because a symptom of a problem is identified and treated as the solution rather than the cause of the problem itself. This will occur when inadequate research or preconceived notions of the problem replace the analysis that is necessary to drill down to the core issues that identify the actual problem.

The PAR team also takes the approach of not only looking at a problem or issue in isolation but also in the broader context of its total environment. Often it is there that the solution or an element of the solution exists to address the issue. For example, the PAR team has been asked to analyze administrative staffing in the Green Lake School District. However, administrative staffing is only one facet of the school district organization and in order to determine its effectiveness, the PAR team needed to consider other operational dynamics of the district such as the district’s educational program, the school board’s goals and the size of the district. As a result, the recommendations of this report will fall into two categories: those that are more relevant to the school organization as a whole and those that are directly related to school administration. It is our belief that the district should seriously consider the recommendations in both categories.



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Recommendations

Strategic Planning/Smart Goals

The PAR Team recommends that the district consider a strategic planning initiative or the development of smart goals. Creating a vision for the future unifies a district around a common purpose that also causes a focus of behavior and a means for accountability. Smart goals are those that are specific (strategic), measureable (accountable), achievable (rigorous), relevant and time-based. The PAR team believes that this is a worthy endeavor for a number of reasons:

1. A strategic plan would articulate the future of the school district. It could be argued that currently many elements of a strategic plan are in place. However, there appears to be some disagreement as to what the plan is and what the elements should be.
2. Declining enrollment is causing some to question the district's viability. Can the district offer the comprehensive curriculum that all students need without some partnering with others that are experiencing the same challenges? Can the district meet the needs of all of the student population not only for the college bound? Can the district be financially viable with a small student enrollment? These are some of the core questions a strategic plan could address.
3. From the interviews it appears there is a need for further clarification of the role that the International Baccalaureate (IB) program will play in the vision or future of the district. This is true for those within the school and also for the community. It is true that key administrative staff (superintendent, principal, guidance counselor) is thoroughly convinced that the IB education program will be very beneficial to Green Lake students; however, there are others that are not so sure or disagree. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that the district develop a comprehensive and objective evaluation of the IB program beginning at the end of this school year. Some questions to be asked and measured are: Is the IB program accomplishing



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what has been intended? Is it meeting the needs of all students? What specific measureable indicators have been developed to ensure that the program is successful? How will teachers, students, and parents be surveyed for their input?

4. A strategic plan provides a framework for the board and staff to make decisions and to evaluate behavior associated with the vision and goals that have been developed. Additionally, a plan assists in task prioritization and enhances accountability of board and staff.
5. A plan provides the opportunity to build trust and enhance communication throughout the school district community. Since it is a shared vision, there should be a comprehensive communications strategy.
6. There are other issues that could be addressed such as the district's aging buildings and educational technology implementation.

Administration Staffing

Administrative staff is primarily responsible for carrying out the vision of the district in addition to managing the necessary day to day operations of the district.

There are literally hundreds of tasks and responsibilities that need to be addressed or are required by law that the district completes each year. It is the nuts and bolts of the school operation such as registering students, filing required state reports, managing district financial assets and liabilities, building maintenance, student transportation, and dealing with unplanned situations such as student discipline and staff absences are just a few examples. All of these responsibilities and events must be addressed on a daily basis and in a timely fashion. They must get done in order for the school to function efficiently.

The other component to the work of the district's administrative team is the implementation of the school district's vision of the future. Currently, IB and the green charter school are two examples of that vision. Preparing the district for the future does not have the immediacy of action but is critical in the long run and requires comprehensive



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planning ability. Rather than constantly and randomly reacting to events, the vision provides the framework within which to make decisions as discussed above.

Assuming the above context for the Green Lake Administrative Team, PAR consultants conclude that the district administrative staffing level at this time is appropriate for the district because of the following reasons.

1. The district has key administrative staff that is relatively inexperienced but growing professionally in their positions. Two examples are the district K-12 principal and business manager. Both need extra administrative support and time as they learn their responsibilities. In the case of the principal whose professional strength is special education, additional attention of the supervision of staff especially at the elementary level appears to be a professional growth need. The business manager is completing many of the school budget cycle responsibilities for the first time and one could argue that it takes one to three years to totally master the complexities of school finance.
2. Position responsibilities appear to be evolving as examples of recently updated position descriptions were presented to WASB consultants. This seems to indicate that the administrative team is continually adjusting to the new demands and requirements that are not unusual when a small administrative staff must share many varied responsibilities. For example, the principal is also the director of special education and the office secretary functions as the school nurse. The superintendent is the principal of the charter school. The district essentially has efficiencies built in since administrative staff has assumed many different and distinct roles.
3. There does not appear to be a comprehensive plan that identifies administrative team staff backing up other positions. This is critical when the district does not have multiple individuals with the same position description title. This can be problematic when illness occurs or when the district experiences staff turnover. Additionally, many of the administrative staff positions have times during the year



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when they may need the assistance of other administrative staff or other assistance. The board and superintendent may want to address the “back up” and load balancing issues.

4. Although PAR consultants are not experts on the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, it appears that there is much that yet needs to be accomplished to ensure that program implementation is successful. For example, it is the consultants’ understanding that this is the first year of full IB implementation. However, aligning the curriculum with IB and the core academic standards and modifying the district’s grading systems are still works in progress that would appear to require additional effort on the part of the administrative team. Additionally, IB has had a tremendous impact upon teaching staff that PAR consultants believe requires additional administrative effort. With the implementation of this new program, the district may wish to reduce the cycle time for teacher evaluations from the current three years for veteran staff to ensure that staff is adequately supported and the program is properly implemented.

Note: There is a section of this report about reducing the superintendent position to less than full time as specified in the engagement agreement.

Position Description Review / Evaluation

The role of the superintendent in a small school district is a very unique one. Without extensive staff expertise and assistance, the superintendent must have a working knowledge of curriculum, instruction, school finance, personnel, food service, transportation and buildings and grounds. Additionally, the small school superintendent must possess leadership, management and effective communication skills. Reflecting situational leadership theory, the superintendent must be prepared and have the skills to effectively intervene in any issue or event related to school district operations. Bottom line, it is the superintendent’s responsibility to ensure that whatever needs to be done in fact gets done.



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The PAR team believes it to be critical that the board undertake a thorough review of the superintendent's position description responsibilities and to the development of a yearly evaluation plan that includes measureable performance goals and objectives that are aligned with the district's goals. It is important for the board and superintendent to have a mutual understanding of expectations as to what his priorities are in terms of tasks and time and how performance will be measured. It should be noted that this recommendation is also valid for the rest of the administrative team. The board and superintendent should ensure that administrative staff position descriptions are updated with a yearly evaluation process that includes goals and objectives that promotes the purpose of their positions and the mission of the district.

Consultants through the interview process sensed that there were concerns about the amount of time the superintendent spends out of the district. For example, advocating for the taxpayers of the district through the Fair Aid Coalition is a worthy endeavor. However, given the administrative team needs outlined above, it is recommended that more time of the superintendent be allocated to the needs of the day to day operations of the district to ensure effective administrative team functioning and educational program implementation. If it is determined that some of the out of district activities are necessary, the board may want to consider assuming some of those assignments.

Administrative Staff Reduction

As part of the WASB PAR study, the school board wanted a brief look at a reduction in leadership staffing. The question was posed as "Can the District Administrator / Superintendent of Schools position be reduced from full time equivalent (FTE) to half time equivalent (i.e. 1.0 FTE to 0.5 FTE)." A reduction in leadership staffing should prompt the school board and staff to ask several operational questions which should be answered satisfactorily before making any decision(s) about leadership staff reductions.

In order to address the staffing question one must recognize the actual leadership staff in a school district as licensed by the Department of Public Instruction in the State of Wisconsin. The Green Lake School District has two licensed administrators – 1.0 FTE



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High School Principal, who also serves as the K-8 Principal and Special Education Director and 1.0 FTE District Administrator / Superintendent of Schools, who also serves as a Charter School Principal for Grades 7 and 8. This leadership staff has a primary responsibility to supervise students in Grades Pre-Kindergarten thru Grade 12, a Charter School for Students in Grades 7 and 8, and handle the other operational issues related to an efficient and effective school district which operates on a daily basis. Some other hidden functions of school leadership, which are sometimes forgotten when thinking about school leadership tasks, are building operations and safety practices, student supervision, student transportation, hot lunch program administration for students, budget building and monitoring, bidding practices, staff hiring and supervision, school closing decisions, preparation for board meetings, community engagement activities, and legislator as well as community leadership engagement activities.

It may be inappropriate to say that a school district cannot operate with less administrative staff; however, it can and should be said that the school district will not operate in the same manner with less administrators as the Green Lake School District currently functions. In order to conduct a reasonable conversation about leadership staff reductions in a truly focused fashion, the district should identify a specific leadership position for reduction and see what things would need to change when a position reduction is pursued. For the purposes of illustration, this report will consider reducing the District Administrator / Superintendent of Schools position to a 0.5 FTE (i.e. 0.5 FTE reduction).

In order to analyze this reduction, the district should examine the current District Administrator / Superintendent of Schools job description and identify any tasks which are not necessary to be completed as written anymore as well as identify what tasks are currently not being done to the satisfaction of the school board. This new list will present several tasks, which will still need to be accomplished with less personnel time (i.e. one half less staffing time). Then, the district will need to examine the current High School Principal job description and identify any tasks which are not necessary to be completed as written anymore as well as identify what tasks are currently not being done to the satisfaction of the school board. It is critical that the school board enter this discussion



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with an understanding that all the same work cannot be completed realistically in the same manner with less people.

It is also necessary that the school board consider some basic questions to facilitate an organizational commitment to future staffing in the school district should changes occur and / or are necessary. The basic questions are:

1. What is the motivator for looking at leadership staff reductions in the Green Lake School District (i.e. money, performance, idle time for leadership staff, etc.)?
2. Who will the school district be able to interest in future school district leadership positions as positions become vacant?
3. Who or how will you train any new leadership staff employed by the Green Lake School District?
4. Will the leadership staff reductions and job description modifications improve the school district functional ability (i.e. efficiency, student performance, community engagement, community leadership engagement, legislative correspondence, etc.)? If so, how are you going to measure the success of the staff modifications?
5. How will you analyze the impact costs and / or organizational welfare on the school district functional ability (i.e. outsourcing costs, position description changes, leadership roles, etc.)? What will be the evaluation criteria for success of the role modifications?
6. Who will be holding staff and / or the school board accountable for their new role responsibilities?
7. How will the community (users and non-users) react to the operational changes due to leadership staff and role reductions?



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8. Will the remaining staff be able to handle any new initiatives (i.e. school district initiatives, state mandates, instructional improvements, etc.)?

The school board should have a meaningful discussion to address the above questions before making any decision about leadership staff reductions, so the school district is prepared for any undesirable reactions or problems that may arise due to operational modifications. The school board should be willing to address other questions, which may arise as you answer the basic questions and modify leadership roles. This planning time will be critical to making any future staff role modifications successful in the Green Lake School District.

Summary

In summary, in analyzing the Green Lake School District operations as requested, the PAR Team did not find any leadership staff with idle time on their hands when analyzing the school district operations as requested.

However, we did hear concerns about time used by leadership staff, new school programs in the implementation stage, training of existing staff, staff supervision, preparation of materials for the School board, and the value of some academic programs. We also were informed that a concern existed by some people centered on school district costs and taxes. These problems are not symptoms of an oversized leadership staff. The issues or problems identified and mentioned during our on-site interviews are real. They should be addressed and it is recommended that they be addressed within the context of the PAR Study recommendations of Strategic Planning Development, IB Program Evaluation, and Position Description Development / Evaluation.

The Green Lake School Board is certainly entitled to act as it deems appropriate; however, the PAR team does not recommend at this time reducing the Green Lake leadership administrative staff from its current levels until the district has considered and implemented the recommendations of this report.

Appendix A

The PAR Program of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards

The Wisconsin Association of School Boards offers school districts an objective method through which to analyze organizational effectiveness. It is called the PAR program: Problem, Assessment, and Response.

When a school system becomes involved in PAR, experienced WASB consultants will examine key operational areas. Through a systemic analysis, specific recommendations are provided which help focus the hard decision-making about the best use of limited district resources to most effectively improve student achievement.

Information about the Wisconsin Association of School Boards PAR Services Program is available under the “Superintendent Search and PAR Program” scan bar link on the WASB website home page or directly at

http://www.wasb.org/websites/superintendent_search_par/index.php?p=456