Robertson County Management Audit Report

Prepared for

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Robertson County School Management Audit Report

I.   <u>Planning</u>

    a.   Persons interviewed: Superintendent, Instructional Supervisor, Director of Special Education, School Principal.

APPROACH:

Who is the leader of the governance and management system?

 The Superintendent, Sanford Holbrook, is the leader of the Robertson County School governance and management system and has served as superintendent for nearly two years. He has developed strong relationships between the board of education and school leadership personnel to build a collaborative team approach to decision-making and ensuring stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities in the governance and management of the district/school. It is evident through interviews with representatives of all stakeholder groups, along with review of artifacts, the superintendent has been proactive in communication about the goals, general plans, and initiatives of the school. He communicates weekly to all board members regarding school events, district happenings, plans for improvement, and areas of need. All board members stated that the superintendent is transparent and inclusive in school business matters and this had been a significant change from past leadership. Board members stated they recognize him as the leader of the system and trust him due to his transparent and conscientious nature. It was stated multiple times during interviews, "The superintendent wants to do what is best for kids and he takes action on the needs of our school."

What documents, policies, procedures indicate how the schools are governed?

The district is governed by policies and procedures developed in collaboration by the local board and superintendent with advisement from the Kentucky School Boards Association (KSBA). District leaders have created OneDrive folders for each board member. The superintendent uploads documents such as board agendas, minutes, and information relevant to upcoming board meetings. This also includes policies and procedures that are up for review at the next board meeting in order for board members to familiarize themselves with changes before the meeting.

The superintendent brings policies and procedures to board meetings periodically for review and revision. For example, the board has recently revised its attendance policy, dual credit policy, and graduation requirement policy. The school does not have a Site Based Decision Making Council (SBDM) nor Advisory Council to assist in the development and implementation of school level policies. However, the school did have a council in previous years and therefore had old policies, some of which, were not congruent with current board policies. As a result, the board has been addressing these discrepancies to ensure alignment between board policy and school policy.

What are the organizational structure and job descriptions of the central office?

Central office consists of the Superintendent who works with the board to develop, deploy, and evaluate district policy and manages the day to day operations of the school district. There is also an Instructional Supervisor who oversees curriculum and instruction for the district, but also performs the roles of the District Assessment

Coordinator, Director of Pupil Personnel, and Counselor. The Director of Special Education manages and oversees special education caseloads but also serves as Gifted and Talented Coordinator, Preschool Director, 504 Coordinator, and English Language Learner Coordinator. There is one Financial Officer who manages and oversees all school accounts and works with the board and superintendent on budgeting, spending, and financial planning. Administrators shared that the most challenging part of their job is effectively managing the number of roles and responsibilities assigned.

What are the communication structures in the school district?

Stakeholder groups shared that one of the most significant changes within district culture and operations was the increased level of communication between the school staff and stakeholders. Board members expressed their satisfaction with the superintendent's transparency about school business and activities. Board members receive communication through text message on a weekly basis and each have access to OneDrive folders of important school- related documents and information. All board meeting agendas and minutes are posted on the district's website for public viewing. This website has also recently undergone reconstruction to become more user friendly and include more information for the public. The finance officer creates a media release immediately following each board meeting to summarize board decisions. This document is emailed to staff and the local media outlet. Staff and parents say the school and district frequently communicate via phone and website in order to inform families and the community about upcoming events and activities at the school. However, there was little evidence that parents and community were involved in the continuous improvement planning process to create a Comprehensive District Improvement Plan that guides the next steps for school improvement. However, interviews and artifacts indicate the CDIP is shared by the district during open board meetings. This reporting also included the 30/60/90-day improvement plan. These are typically presented by the instructional supervisor, educational recovery staff, and school principal.   Interviews and artifacts indicate central office personnel present information to the board on a regular basis regarding their assigned job roles and responsibilities. Board members indicated the finance officer, in particular, gave monthly reports regarding the financial status of the district and was proactive in explaining financial situations. One board member stated the finance officer was always willing to meet individually to review any financial reports or documents and answer questions.

What is the relationship between the central office and the Board of Education?

Interviews indicated a very positive relationship between the board and central office personnel. The term "team" was used several times when describing how the board and central office worked together. There is a high level of trust and transparency between the two entities along with a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. Board members indicated they do not get involved in the day to day operations of the school and trust the central office personnel hired to do such work. The phrase "we are a family" was used multiple times during interviews. Board members and central office personnel expressed an appreciation for the work accomplished together and the learning that occurred for everyone throughout the state assistance process.

DEPLOYMENT:

How far into the organization is the understanding of how the district is governed?

Interviews indicated a general understanding of stakeholders on how the district is governed. Each stakeholder group indicated the superintendent works with the board through policy development and implementation for deployment via the day to day operation of the school. Evidence suggests the district has taken steps to correct many of the governance issues identified in the last state management audit. In a collaborative manner, the superintendent, board members, and finance officer have taken steps to correct financial processes that include appropriate budgeting, shared decision-making in expenditures, implementation of standard school accounting procedures (i.e. use of purchase orders, monthly account balancing, submission of receipts for reimbursements), and monthly reporting. Interviews indicated the careful attention to the financial management of district funds by the board, superintendent, and financial officer and the efforts taken to ensure everyone is aware of the financial status of the district have contributed to student achievement.

The superintendent and district office staff stated many of the problems and issues had been corrected or addressed but there was still a lack of a documented processes for how things are done or how decisions are made. He indicated the need to document the systems being used in order to create sustainability in school improvements. Similarly, the instructional supervisor indicated a lack of specific policies, procedures, and protocols around the continuous improvement process. She stated there is a need to have a documented system as well.

The principal states he has the autonomy to run the school and has been empowered by the superintendent to make school based decisions. In turn, the principal attends all board meetings and presents to the board regarding student performance data. He stated the board members and superintendent ask for his input on a regular basis regarding the impact of policy and procedure development and/or revisions.
Teachers and parents indicated the superintendent and board members work together for the best interest of the students and that decisions are made public and accessible. Staff members receive a media release of board information immediately after each board meeting highlighting decisions and important information.

How do you know?

Stakeholders indicated during interviews the district has incorporated a transparent system of governance and leadership. Multiple interviews revealed a high level of trust for the superintendent who has created positive relationships and a common vision with stakeholders, including the community.

LEARNING:

How are changes in policy and administrative tasks communicated in the organization?

Artifacts reviewed by the team and discussed with school personnel included media releases that are shared with both community and staff immediately following board meetings. The finance officer sends all policy and procedure revisions to staff members seeking input and comment before final approval by the board.

How do they know that the policies and procedures are working?

Based upon interviews and artifact review, the board and school leadership employ infrequent and informal methods for determining whether policies and procedures are working effectively. This is mainly accomplished through conversation and observation by school leadership during district leadership team meetings. Although, there is evidence of plus deltas being used by school leadership on a variety of issues, there is little evidence of monitoring policies and procedures for effectiveness.

What are the processes in place to change the policies and procedures?

There is some evidence of an informal process for changing policies and procedures. According to the superintendent, he and the district leadership team discuss and decide what policies need to be reviewed and revised by the board. He also states the board uses the Kentucky School Board Association to address policy updates. Board members stated Mr. Holbrook brings policies to the board for review and revision frequently on an as-needed basis. There was no evidence provided regarding policies and procedures adopted by the board for a formalized system of policy and/or procedure review and revision.

INTEGRATION:

What evidence is there that the policies and procedures work together for the goals of the school district/student achievement?

Review of board meeting agendas and minutes indicate a regular reporting of student performance and academic achievement data on a regularly scheduled basis to board members. Central office staff, along with PLC groups from the school, report on student performance, implemented interventions, and initiatives to improve teaching and learning. The Comprehensive District Improvement Plan addresses specific goals and objectives; however, it does not include actionable statements referring to specific policies and procedures that would sustain the increases in student performance.

PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Leadership must sustain the improvement efforts by building written protocols and processes to guide the future work. In addition, documented protocols should include implementation levels of improvement initiatives and strategies for monitoring for effectiveness. This work should begin with the shared development of a CDIP and CSIP by representatives from all stakeholder groups that truly guide the day-to-day workings of the system from Kentucky Board of Education goals chunked into actionable next steps.
- While district administrators have begun to revise board and school policies based on day-to-day need in a reactive manner, a structure for regularly reviewing and updating policies in a continuous manner must be created.
- Leadership should address the recommendation from the last management audit around implementing a site based decision making council. This group would alleviate the need for the board of education to deal with both district and school level policy and would promote collaborative decision making to include

teachers and parents. This additional structure would also provide another layer of sustainable protocols and policies toward student achievement and efficiency.

II.   Instruction Management

   a.   Team Members: Team Members: Susan A. Greer, Office of Continuous Improvement; Tim Godbey, Office of Continuous Improvement; Mike Murphy, Office Continuous Improvement; Carolyn Spangler, Office of Continuous Improvement.

   b.   Interviewed: Superintendent, Instructional Supervisor, Director of Special Education, School Principal.

APPROACH

Who is the leader of the curriculum and instructional processes in the district?

The Instructional Supervisor is Holly Linville who serves as the leader of curriculum and instruction. She is also the district assessment coordinator, the director of pupil personnel, fulfills particular duties of the guidance counselor role and works with the district gifted and talented program as a coordinator. Her roles include many extra duties (e.g., submitting policy to the board of education for revision and/or for development of procedures.) The Special Education Director is Tamara Leadingham. Interviews indicated Holly Linville leads curriculum and instruction processes through a collaborative approach that included the district leadership team comprised of the superintendent, principal and other district leaders.

What processes are in place to ensure that core curriculum is aligned with state standards processes and horizontally aligned within the district?

Based on a document review and administrative interviews, the work around curriculum and instruction occurred during Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), teachers' meetings, and informal individual teacher sessions. The District Leadership Team, in collaboration with teacher leaders, chose to adopt EngageNY math and reading curriculum. The math curriculum has been in place for almost two years and reading has been in place since the summer of 2016. During the implementation of the math curriculum, teachers reported concerns in maintaining the pacing established by the EngageNY curriculum. Based on interviews, some math teachers have adjusted pacing guides but not in a formalized manner.

Lexia Reading was purchased to supplement the reading curriculum in grades K-5. Although teachers attend content training with Kentucky Educational Development Cooperative and Northern Kentucky University for science, no curriculum alignment was evidenced in science or social studies. Curriculum documents, provided for the team, contain dates from past school years and do not illustrate current revisions or additions. While there is a Robertson County Board Policy (Curriculum and Instruction: Course of Study policy 08.11) requiring course syllabi for all courses, evidence of only some syllabi was documented. Based on interviews, there is a plan in place to ensure compliance with this policy by all instructors.

Interim data (e.g., Discovery Education/Think Link, district-developed EOC Benchmarks, weekly classroom Dipsticks) were examined by the District Leadership Team and shared with teachers. However, the extent to which these data analyses are used to modify and/or adjust curriculum for vertical and horizontal alignment remains unclear.

Based on the 2016 Teaching and Learning Review report results, the district was rated a level 2 on indicator 3.1 and this indicator, in combination with 3.6, was chosen as an Improvement Priority to guide the next steps for school and system improvement. Indicator 3.1 states, "The system's curriculum, instructional design and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning across all grades and courses." A level 2 rating states, "Curriculum and learning experiences in each course/class provide most students across the system with challenging and equitable opportunities to develop learning skills, thinking skills and life skills. There is little evidence to indicate curriculum and learning experiences prepare students for success at the next level. Most like courses/classes have equivalent learning expectations. Some individualized learning activities for each student are evident randomly or in some but not all schools." Based on shared curriculum documents online, there is little evidence supporting the systematic occurrence of vertical or horizontal curriculum alignment across the district.

In Goal 4, strategy 1 of the Comprehensive District Improvement Plan (CDIP), an activity states, "Develop an improvement plan to ensure that students receive a highly effective, culturally responsive, evidence-based, developmentally appropriate instruction within the core that is aligned tightly to state standards." The existence of such a formalized plan was not evidenced. Based on teacher interviews, teachers meet informally at their own discretion in order to discuss curriculum revisions or development. Staff could not identify any common structure for developing curriculum or curriculum mapping.

How do you measure effectiveness of these processes?

Based on documents and interviews, Student Achievement Data (e.g., KPREP, ACT, Think Link, EOC Benchmarks, weekly Dipsticks) as well as stakeholder plus deltas and PLC opportunities were used to measure effectiveness. However, there was little documented evidence of a systematic process for vertical and horizontal alignment of curriculum and its revision beyond the use of EngageNY. There is no consistent or formalized PLC protocol (principal indicated that teachers have autonomy to develop PLC agendas and there is not a mandated PLC protocol) that guides the work of the PLC to ensure that curriculum is adjusted based on the data from multiple classroom measures or from the examination of professional practice and curriculum. Evidence provided by the district included correspondence between members of the district leadership team and staff that focused on pacing of the teaching of standards but the extent to which the issue was resolved or addressed system-wide remains unclear.

What processes are in place to ensure that rigorous, engaging instructional strategies are used in classrooms?

Classroom observations revealed that the High Expectations Learning Environment that includes high expectations, challenging but attainable activities and learning and learners engage in tasks that require higher order thinking received an overall rating of 2.4 on a 4 point scale during this review; whereas, the same Environment also scored 2.4 based on the 2016 Teaching and Learning Report. Although there is a lack of movement in this learning environment, the tremendous increase in student performance scores indicated district/school support for curriculum and instruction.

While interviews and school-level-created forms suggest that teachers monitor and adjust curriculum and assessment, stakeholders were not consistently able to define or explain how curriculum, instruction and assessment are monitored and adjusted systematically. Interviews indicated limited agreement regarding the adjustment of teaching strategies to meet the learning needs of students by individualizing instruction. Additionally, classroom observation data revealed students have limited differentiated learning opportunities (scoring a 2.0 on a 4 point scale in regard to A.1. "Learners engage in differentiated learning opportunities and/or activities that meet their needs") and "Learners receive/respond to feedback (from teachers/peers/other resources) to improve understanding and/or revise work" (scoring a 2.4 on a 4 point scale in this area).

Professional learning and PLCs occur across the system to promote the use of effective instructional strategies; although, the systematic impact of this work remains unclear as a single factor that has promoted student growth and achievement.

What evidences are there of alternative programming for students?

The Robertson County Board Policy, under section Alternative Education (09.4341), states, "The purpose of the Board's Alternative Education Program is to provide:

- Learning activities that support innovative pathways and are aligned to college and career outcomes for all students.
- A curriculum that is aligned with the Kentucky Academic Standards and the learning goals in each student's Individual Learning Plan (ILP).
- Successful student transition to the regular school assignment, when possible, or to post-secondary status.
- A meaningful alternative to suspension and/or expulsion of a student." This is a KSBA required policy.

Evidence of alternative programming included Special Education services, 504 plan services and credit recovery opportunities. Interviews also indicated a K-12 grade FMD/MSD unit exists. These students are all mainstreamed periodically during the day in accordance with their individualized plans. The district leadership members and principal expressed a need for additional mental health counseling as the current mental health counseling is provided by a counselor who is contracted with the Comprehend Inc. Community group only one day per week. The GEAR UP Coordinator based in the school provides career advising. The guidance counselor position at the school was cut leaving gaps in the provision of student services.

What documents, policies, procedures are being used to ensure curriculum/ special education requirements are being met?

Required policies were housed online via the district webpage. The Director of Special Education stated that she uses a monitoring tool distributed by the Kentucky Education Development Corporation (KEDC) for monitoring folder compliance. The district also volunteered for a compliance audit to be conducted in May of 2017. However, the team shares concerns regarding the number of case load assignments in addition to servicing students on a mixed campus with only two teachers for three levels (elementary grades, middle school grades and high school grades.)

Under Goal 4, Strategy 1 of the district's CDIP, an actionable statement dealing with interventions states, "Update and continue to modify a multi-tiered service delivery system for instruction. Development of this system would encompass:

- Protocols to make decisions between tiers
- Schedule conducive to maximize instructional time and flexibility
- Research based interventions implemented with fidelity
- Progress monitoring to inform instruction
- Data analysis to drive decision making."

The activity beginning date is January of 2017 and the end date is December 2017. Currently the leadership team has made progress in regard to this activity. Based on interviews, elementary teachers especially have worked to personalize instruction to meet student needs within the regular classroom. Although two retired teachers have been hired to provide intervention for students mostly in a pull-out setting, the parameters for intervention curriculum and practice have not been clarified. During the pull-out time, some students miss required content and learning experiences occurring in the regular classroom. While an RTI time slot has been added to the school day, interviewees stated that the curriculum and learning inside this block have not become formalized and teachers are still being coached toward meeting individual student needs. Included in the evidence is the Robertson County RTI (Response to Intervention) Protocol which creates a context for the need for RTI although it does not represent a systematic approach to implementing RTI structures and processes in a formal, school-wide manner.

How do you measure effectiveness of these processes?

Based on interviews, the District Leadership Team states that they utilize data analysis, fall and spring enrollment and End of Year reports to measure effectiveness. Documents (e.g. meeting agendas, minutes, matrices) reveal evidence of discussions around data and reactions to it but do not exhibit the intentional creation of actionable steps for evaluating effectiveness.

DEPLOYMENT

What evidence is there that the processes identified are deployed with fidelity throughout the organization?

Evidence provided to the team and interviews reveal that the processes identified remain in the awareness/implementation phase and are not deployed throughout the organization.

LEARNING

What processes are in place to use data and information to improve learning processes?

Documents provided to the team included evidence (e.g., PLC protocol form, minutes form, monitoring form, Think Link data, Assessment protocol, EOC Benchmark data, Reading Plus data, and Khan Academy data sets) as the processes that the school uses for continuous improvement efforts.

Multiple teacher and administrator interviews repeatedly stated that the school is now very much a data driven school. Interviews also reveal the school's war room serves as a repository for the collection of data sets, EOC Benchmark results and Lexia data. The War Room houses the tracking of individual student progress and area of need. However, the integration of the room into continuous improvement efforts remains unclear.

An expectation from school administration is in place for teachers to meet weekly in a PLC setting and to complete a PLC form; however, agenda items are determined and set by the teachers. The PLC form is sent to building administration once completed as a tracking mechanism of PLC work. Robertson County School administration has developed a College and Career Monitoring Form used to track and group students based on data. Kindergarten teachers use a Standards Based Grading and Reporting system. There is a school assessment protocol and expectation, as well as Classroom assessment protocol and a district common benchmark assessment process. There is evidence of eleot walkthroughs conducted by administration and data collected in an eleot spreadsheet with results charted and graphed. However, it remains unclear how that data is used to change instructional practice or to improve learning processes. Coaching and feedback, based on interviews with teachers and administrators, is predominantly conducted via email. The school does have a 30/60/90-day plan in which the Improvement Priorities from the 2016 Teaching and Learning Report have been partially addressed and continues to drive the 30/60/90-day plan.

Based on interviews and limited documentation, the tracking of the weekly PLC work is conducted through the completion of forms that are emailed to the principal. The extent to which actionable steps result that increase student achievement and instructional practice is not evident. Based on interviews, the updating of student assessment data occurs in the War Room; however, it is not clear as to the urgency of data being updated or shared in a timely manner. There is not yet an intentional vertical alignment of curriculum nor a systematic method for evaluating learning processes. While daily, quarterly and benchmark assessments and professional learning communities are in place, they are not deployed in a consistent manner across the organization. The District Leadership Team has not yet created clear structures that ensure this systematic implementation and monitoring of learning processes.

It is not clear as to the extent to which the disaggregated data was used by principals and/or teachers to improve student achievement or to change instructional practice. While there is an Assessment Data Analysis Tool Protocol document, there is no evidence of the consistent implementation of this protocol. Furthermore, it is unclear how the CDIP/CSIP goals and strategies were created nor is there evidence that it drives the school improvement process. It is not clearly evident as to how the district/school leadership monitors and supports the required structures identified in CDIP/CSIP for implementation or effectiveness.

According to the Classroom Assessment Protocol found in the Robertson County Assessment Protocols, there is an identified process and protocol for setting the expectation of the daily use of formative assessments to inform

instructional practices. The implementation of this protocol was not mentioned during interviews or observed widely during classroom observations.

What evidence is there that these are working?

The district has made significant improvement based upon Kentucky's Accountability and Assessment System. The district has moved to the 7th highest performing school district in the state with a label of Distinguished/Progressing. This accomplishment has been celebrated and recognized by school and community stakeholders. Evidence from interviews and artifacts indicate district and school leadership have made efforts to improve governance, culture and climate and an overall sense of ownership regarding student success. There is still a lack of evidence that many of the initiatives and processes created and developed are being implemented with fidelity or evaluated for overall effectiveness. In light of the success the district has experienced in overall school accountability, there still exists a concern of overall sustainability.

What data and information are used?

The district uses mainly informal procedures and processes around state assessment scores and a variety of other assessment data as described within the narratives above.

<u>INTEGRATION</u>

How is the learning from each of the levels used to improve the overall system?

Based on document reviews and interviews of building level administrators, teachers, as well as district level leadership and Board of Education members, evidence of a systematic, intentional process and protocol for improvement is in the awareness/implementation phase in regard to continuous improvement efforts throughout the Robertson County School District. There is evidence to suggest a collaborative effort among district level leadership, Board of Education members, parents and community to inform decision making. Consequently, there is little evidence to support the district level comprehensive improvement planning process is being conducted in a systematic, collaborative and cohesive process that is communicated regularly and clearly to all stakeholders.

Instruction Management Recommendation:

- Leadership should find a means to create a guidance counselor position for the district. While a counseling position is not required by regulation, the position is necessary to improve students' mental, emotional, and social health, provide interventions and promulgate referrals. Counselors and psychologists contribute not only to the health of students but also to the health of the school environment.