

Executive Summary



A TASA-CMSi Curriculum Audit™ Small School District of the Lackland Independent School District

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Lackland ISD Curriculum Audit by the numbers

Site Visit Date:
March 27-29, 2023

52

interviews conducted with
staff, administrators, board
members, and parents



400

curriculum
documents and
board policies
reviewed



46

classrooms observed



124

survey responses from parents,
teachers, and administrators



219

student work
artifacts evaluated

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This Audit Report is comprised of two sections:

The **Executive Summary** provides an overview of the audit findings and recommendations in a short, graphic format.

The **Expanded Report** gives a more complete discussion of audit methodology and discusses the findings and recommendations at length. The Expanded Report also presents the extensive data analyzed and an explanation of what those data demonstrated in the context of the audit.

Introduction: The CMSi Curriculum Audit



This document constitutes the Executive Summary of a Small School District Curriculum Audit of the Lackland Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas. A Curriculum Audit is designed to reveal the extent to which leaders and personnel of a school district have developed and implemented a coordinated, valid, and comprehensive system to manage the design, development, implementation, evaluation, and support of curriculum. Curriculum is defined as the set of learnings students are expected to master over the course of their years in the district. The system to manage this curriculum, when implemented effectively and in alignment with the district’s vision for student engagement, will yield improved student learning and achievement over time if all its related processes and components are operating in coordination with one another. The effectiveness of curriculum management results as well in increased efficiency and assures district taxpayers that all fiscal support is optimized within the conditions under which the district functions.

District Background

The Lackland Independent School District is located on Lackland Air Force Base (AFB) in San Antonio, Texas. The district has been in operation since 1953, and currently serves children of service members and contract employees stationed at Lackland AFB on two

campuses. Lackland Elementary School houses grades PreK-5, and grades 6-12 students attend Stacey Junior/Senior High. Despite a high mobility rate due to parent military assignment, enrollment has remained fairly stable at close to 1,000 students. In October 2022-23, total enrollment was 968. The largest ethnic groups are White (45%) and Hispanic (27%); 91% of students are military-connected. The fiscal year 2022-23 budget is \$20,241,106, with about half the district revenue coming from federal funds.

System Purpose for Conducting the Audit

Dr. Burnie Roper has been superintendent of Lackland ISD since 2009. Under his leadership, the district has done well, but saw a drop in student achievement during the 2020 pandemic. However, the district has this year adopted a detailed strategic plan that calls for significant improvements in student achievement through development of highly effective instruction, reinvolvement of families, and continued efforts to create a positive school culture among stakeholders. The audit was requested to provide a roadmap to efficiently and effectively meet the improvement goals and ensure that processes are up-to-date so that changes can be institutionalized and continued after the expected retirement of several key leadership personnel in 2028.

CMSi Audit History

The Curriculum Audit™ has established itself as a process of integrity and candor in assessing public school districts. Over the last 40 years, it has become recognized internationally as an important, viable, and valid tool for the improvement of educational institutions and for the improvement of curriculum design and delivery.

The Curriculum Audit represents a “systems” approach to educational improvement; that is, it considers the system as a whole rather than a collection of separate, discrete parts. Auditors closely examine and evaluate the interrelationships of system departments, levels, and related processes to determine their impact on the overall quality of the organization in accomplishing its primary purpose of improving student learning.

The audit process was first developed by Dr. Fenwick W. English and implemented in 1979 in the Columbus Public School District in Columbus, Ohio. The audit is based upon generally-accepted concepts pertaining to effective instruction and curricular design and delivery, some of which have been popularly referred to as the “effective schools research.” An audit is an independent examination of four data sources: documents, interviews, online surveys, and site visits. These are gathered and triangulated to reveal the extent to which a school district is meeting its goals and objectives related to improving student learning and achievement. The process culminates in a comprehensive written report to district leaders that summarizes district strengths, audit findings, and the auditors’ recommended actions for improvement.

Curriculum Audits have been performed in hundreds of school systems in more than 46 states, the District of Columbia, and several other countries, including Canada, Saudi Arabia, New Zealand, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Bermuda. Details about the methodology employed in the audit process and biographical information about the audit team are covered in the Appendices.

Audit Scope of Work

The audit’s scope is centered on curriculum and instruction, as well as any aspect of operations within a school system that enhances or hinders curriculum design and/or delivery. The audit is an intensive and focused “snapshot” evaluation of how well a school system such as Lackland Independent School District has been able to set valid directions for pupil accomplishment and well-being; concentrate its resources to accomplish those directions; and improve its performance, however contextually defined or measured, over time.

The Curriculum Audit does not examine any aspect of school system operations unless it pertains to the design and delivery of curriculum. For example, auditors would not examine the cafeteria function unless students were going hungry and were, therefore, unable to learn. In some cases, ancillary findings from a Curriculum Audit are so interconnected with the capability of a school system to attain its central objectives that they become major, interactive forces that, if not addressed, will severely compromise the ability of the school system to successfully meet student needs.



The Curriculum Audit centers its focus on the main business of schools: teaching, curriculum, and learning. Auditors use five focus areas against which to compare, verify, and comment upon a district's existing curricular management practices. The focus areas reflect a management system that is ideal, but not unattainable. They describe working characteristics that any complex work organization should possess in achieving stated organizational goals while being responsive to the unique needs of its clients.

A school system that is using its financial and human resources for the greatest benefit of its students is able to establish clear objectives, examine alternatives, select and implement alternatives, measure results as they develop against established objectives, and adjust its efforts so that it achieves its objectives.

The five focus areas employed in the TASA-CMSi Curriculum Audit™ are:

- 1 District Vision and Accountability:** The school district has a clear vision and demonstrates its control of resources, programs, and personnel.
- 2 Curriculum:** The school district has established clear and valid objectives for students and clientele.
- 3 Consistency and Equity:** The school district demonstrates internal consistency and rational equity in its program development and implementation.
- 4 Feedback:** The school district uses the results from district-designed or adopted assessments to adjust, improve, or terminate ineffective practices or programs.
- 5 Productivity:** The school district has improved its productivity and efficiency, particularly in the use of resources.

The auditors report where and how district practices, policies, and processes have met or not met the criteria and expectations related to each focus area and what specific action steps are recommended for revising areas needing improvement. These findings and their corresponding recommendations are presented in detail in the expanded report.



Lackland Independent School District Strengths

Lackland ISD has a history of excellence. Both campuses have earned the Department of Education's National Blue Ribbon School award, and the district has enjoyed high report card ratings from the Texas Education Agency. Although small in size compared to many Texas districts, the Lackland ISD offers a substantial array of academic and social experiences for its students, endeavoring to prepare them for success worldwide. Student mobility is a constant challenge for the district, as are the social-emotional issues connected with military life, but the district focus on provision of a safe and nurturing environment that recognizes the value of individuals is evident at all levels in all departments. In particular, auditors noted several strengths of the district:

1 Stable Staff

3 Adequate Resources

2 Small Class Size

4 Leadership Committed to Whole Child Development

“Although our students are very diverse, they are all experiencing the same things [moving, new friends, military parents]. Their similar situation gives them a common basis.”
(Board Member)

1 Stable Staff

A large proportion of teachers and administrators have been with the district 10 years or more. On average, teachers have 15 years of experience, including an average of 8 years with Lackland ISD. Campus administrators also average eight years of experience with the district. With the exception of a new Chief Financial Officer, district tenure among key leadership positions in central office was at least seven years.

2 Small Class Size

Classes generally have 13-18 students, allowing opportunity for individualization of the curriculum. Teachers and parents consistently cited small classes as a strength of the district. Typical comments from the online surveys included: “Small classroom sizes allow more individual student one on one.” (Parent) “The small size helps us get to know all of the kids in a grade level and not just the ones in our class.” (Instructional Staff)

3 Adequate Resources

The district is financially sound, and funding has historically been above the state average. A healthy fund balance provides security against unexpected needs.

4 Leadership Committed to Whole Child Development

In addition to high academic goals, the Lackland ISD is committed to student development through after school clubs, social-emotional counseling groups, an outstanding clinic, increasing family involvement, and connections to military community resources. Parents also reported that the district cares about students. Seventy-nine percent of parents responding to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “The school does a good job teaching my child the skills needed to be successful,” and 76% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “My child is always treated fairly and with kindness at school.”



Key Focus Areas

1

District Vision and Accountability: Vision is foundational for establishing a framework for all decision making throughout the district and for ensuring that those decisions move the district in a single direction toward its established mission and goals. These goals and expectations must be clearly defined in policy to establish the parameters within which decisions across the various levels, departments, and campuses/schools are made. A functional organizational structure is also needed to assure that all personnel have defined responsibilities that do not overlap and to assure accountability at all levels. Accountability is essential in coordinating efforts and supporting efficacy across the system.

2

Curriculum: Written curriculum, as the most critical tool to support high quality teaching and learning, not only defines high levels of student learning, but also supports teachers with suggestions on how to deliver differentiated, student-centered instruction that is responsive to students' needs, backgrounds, and perspectives. A strong curriculum assists teachers in meeting the needs of their students more effectively by prioritizing and defining essential learning targets in measurable terms and providing the formative assessment tools needed to diagnose and monitor student learning. Strong written curriculum also promotes equity by clarifying for teachers what on-level learning looks like.

3

Consistency and Equity: All students in the system should have equal access to programs and services, and no students should be excluded from the regular classroom environment at rates that are not commensurate with their peers. Equity refers to students being treated in accordance with need, rather than the same as everyone else. Allocating resources and supports equitably is necessary if all students are to be equally successful academically. Under Consistency and Equity, auditors also examine the degree to which the educational program and its supporting programs, such as ELL, Special Education, or Gifted, are defined and implemented with consistency across the system.

4

Feedback: Within the context of student learning expectations and a clear vision for how students should be engaged and demonstrate their learning in the classroom, having aligned assessments that measure progress and provide feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the system is of prime importance. The audit expects school systems to have common, aligned formative assessment tools that provide teachers and building leaders with clear and specific feedback regarding student progress and learning needs. A coordinated system must be in place for data to be collected, interpreted, and accessed by teachers so that they have valid information for planning instruction.

5

Productivity: When all aspects of system operations are functional and effective, productivity should be evident within existing financial constraints. Over time, as the system improves and each department and school builds stronger components that work in coordination, leaders are able to allocate resources more effectively and adjust programming so that ineffective initiatives are terminated or modified in accordance with data. Support systems necessary for effective operations are clearly tied to district goals and vision, and district facilities are likewise supportive of the educational program.

What We Found

The following section presents a summary of the areas where there is the greatest need for improvement and growth in the Lackland Independent School District. These findings represent the five focus areas applied to the district for the Curriculum Audit™.

Focus Area One: Board policy and district-wide planning are important in establishing systems of control throughout a district and giving authority to administrative actions. Auditors found that in Lackland ISD most district policies reflect legal requirements based on legislation and case law. Few administrative procedures (also referred to as comprehensive plans) have been developed to explain the district philosophy, provide guidance on what the policy requirements really mean, and list steps to processes. As a result, teachers use personal preferences or past experience to guide decisions, resulting in fragmented processes that consume energy that should instead be focused on goal attainment. This is particularly true in relation to curriculum, classroom instruction, and professional development. No policy directly addresses these three areas in an organized and complete fashion.

“There isn’t really a prescribed way to do anything.”
(Administrator)

Focus Area Two: Efforts are underway to design and develop curriculum. The existing documents are incomplete and so are not yet fully useful to teachers (only about a third of teachers report using the district or school developed curriculum). Instead, teachers decide what standards to focus on and use resources from a variety of sources as they see fit. The end result is multiple alternative curricula, which are not vertically or horizontally aligned, and which provide only a shotgun approach to mastering state assessments.

“We need to do better about finding smart and creative ways to help our students climb back to where they need to be.” (Board Member)

Focus Area Three: Classroom instruction represents the “loosely-held” implementation of the “tightly-held” district curriculum. Teachers should have freedom to choose among aligned and rigorous resources to create engaging lessons that allow students to explore, create, and evaluate. Auditors did not observe this happening in Tier One instruction either through classroom observations or artifact analysis. Instead, the bulk of student work was low interest and required low cognitive effort, with an emphasis on repetition of teacher-led steps. Tasks that involved meaningful writing, analysis, and devising/testing hypotheses were noticeably absent.

No systems exist for non-evaluative monitoring of instructional delivery or for the use of monitoring results to determine professional development needs. Among 48 teacher respondents to the online survey, 51% said they “rarely” see a district administrator in their classroom, and 38% said a principal rarely visits their classroom. A variety of professional development is available, but tiered training requirements have not been established, and there is no systematic approach to increasing staff capacity.

“We don’t have a problem with instructional assistants being pulled for sub duty. That’s a real strength for our campus.” (Instructional Staff)

Focus Area Four: A comprehensive approach to student assessment measures how much students have learned and, therefore, the effectiveness of the district curriculum and its presentation. Presently, campuses use a variety of assessments to measure broad progress several times per year, with an emphasis on state assessments and teacher-created tests. Teachers report they have enough assessment data to measure student progress, and 58% claim to disaggregate every assessment by individual student in order to guide instruction. Yet, numerous subjects are not assessed at every grade level, and little to no differentiation was observed in classrooms or student work artifacts. This indicates a lack of understanding of the nature and processes of assessment and data use. The process of using formative assessment data to monitor and document students' progress toward mastery is hindered by the lack of a quality written curriculum. However, without central coordination and written guidance, the process will remain fractured and ineffective in achieving the intended goal of student success.

“Mobility is an issue, but it could be an issue we can easily overcome.” (Board Member)

Focus Area Five: The district is financially sound, but could be more productive with the implementation of performance-based principles. Budget allocations are determined based on a program and per student formula. No provision for budgeting based on proven effectiveness of programs has been implemented. Instead, the general approach is to gather subjective teacher feedback. Several instances of program acquisition based on a single person's opinion were reported in interviews. Over time, the result is maintaining programs and resources that are ineffective, duplicative, or not used.

“When it comes to staffing, we are doing very well. Typically, people don't leave once they start working here.” (Administrator)





I'm encouraging teachers to start including students in understanding their own data. (Administrator)

Personally, I have worked with great teachers here the last four years. (Instructional Staff)

Being military people—the parents and all of us are very routine-based. We do not like it when our routine changes without being given warning. We need time to adjust so communication ahead of time is important. (Board Member)

The teachers all really seem to care about the kiddos. (Parent)

We would like to see more parent participation overall...it can be a struggle to get them involved. (Administrator)





Key Recommendations

Progress toward improvement requires a long-term commitment of time, energy, and material resources. To be truly successful, changes must be owned by those affected—not just mandated from the top. The curriculum management audit report intention is to focus on materiality; that is, given the capacity of the district, what systemic problems in the district must be fixed first and to what degree in order to have the biggest impact on improvement. As a result, some problems uncovered by auditors are not reported formally, and many steps in recommendations are left to districts to determine. For Lackland ISD at this time, auditors make three recommendations, each with multiple parts. What follows is a summary of the recommendations contained in the Expanded Report.

1

District Vision and Control: Increase district control over some aspects of curriculum management through new/revised policies and adjustment of the district strategic plan action steps and timelines.

2

Curriculum and Instruction: Develop and implement a comprehensive curriculum management system to provide district-wide direction for the design, development, and delivery of the curriculum.

3

Human Capital and Productivity: Increase human capital and productivity through systematic professional development based on performance-indicated needs identified through monitoring of curriculum delivery and evaluation of the curriculum through student assessment. Implement systems for performance-based budgeting and program evaluation.

“We need more coherence and less redundancy so that systems speak to each other fluently.” (Administrator)

Recommendations

The following are the summations of recommended actions to address the areas needing improvement in the findings section.

Recommendation 1 calls for adoption of new and/or revised existing board policies and district-wide plans to communicate, clarify, and expand governance expectations for curriculum management. Recommended actions aim to establish a firm foundation for the components of curriculum management that should be tightly held (non-negotiable). Policy is the board's voice. If expectations are not expressed in policy, the assumption will be that the board has no expectations. Ultimately, this leads to fragmentation of effort and a reduced likelihood of goal attainment. Completion of this recommendation is expected to take 6-12 months.

Recommendation 2 calls for development and implementation of a comprehensive curriculum management system. Recommended actions are designed to create the details needed to provide direction for a comprehensive system of curriculum management through administrative regulations and procedures for written curriculum design development, and the delivery of the written curriculum. District deliverables include a plan for determining the design of district curriculum (such as a defined

instructional model, what will be included in the written curriculum, and timelines for achievement that dovetail with the strategic plan); a defined written curriculum; and explicit expectations for delivery of the written curriculum. Completing the bulk of this recommendation is expected to take five years, with ongoing work after that.

Recommendation 3 address development and implementation of systems to increase the capacity and productivity of human capital throughout the district. This includes monitoring of curriculum delivery leading to a comprehensive, progressively-tiered system of professional development, a student assessment plan and processes to implement the plan, and expectations/processes for the collection, dissemination, and use of a variety of data for curriculum and program evaluation. Changes in organizational structure are expected to be completed within six months although work will be ongoing as changes are implemented. Creating a comprehensive professional development system is done concurrently with curriculum development and will take several years. Creating and implementing a district model for selection, implementation, and evaluation of programs should also occur concurrently with curriculum development, leading to adoption of performance-based budgeting principles.





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