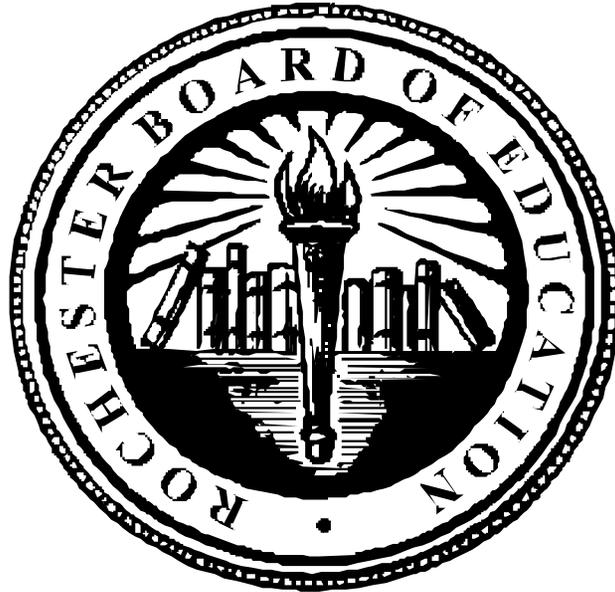# OFFICE OF AUDITOR GENERAL

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Graduation Readiness

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Audit Report

OBJECTIVE

To evaluate the operating control environment and related controls in place to support the Student Promotion and Graduation readiness.

BACKGROUND

Urban districts consistently have difficulty with low student graduation rates. The District has invested with internal assessments and enhanced computer systems, to facilitate early detection and monitoring, to ensure students are on track, and to graduate within four years. Focused comprehensive review often takes place across the District when a student reaches their senior year. However, effective monitoring must take place prior to the twelfth grade to facilitate timely graduation. The District has transcript information in the Student Management System, Chancery SMS. In addition, Datacation is a software system created to facilitate tracking student progress against graduation requirements.   Although Datacation is populated from the Chancery system, it creates a user friendly method of monitoring in lieu of a paper tracking process.

SCOPE

The audit period reviewed is the current school year from September 2011 to April 2012. We will review the operating protocols and procedures in place at Monroe High School to ensure that student progress is actively monitored for all students grades 7 through 12. Our review will evaluate the methods of student interaction, analysis of student assessments and report cards, counseling documentation, tracking, monitoring and Administrator reporting to monitor student achievement. We will review Chancery SMS and Datacation as needed to improve our understanding of the control environment.

CONCLUSION

More focused efforts towards grade promotion and graduation monitoring should take place for students at all grades. Recognizing that counselors have student loads in excess of 200, they must strategically prioritize their time across all of their students. Even with this significant responsibility, it is important to have a standard framework and expectations to ensure that all students receive appropriate support. Each counselor performs their responsibilities as they deem appropriate, and student contact and activities differ by counselor. In all cases, we noted considerable manual grade review and tracking, when Datacation is available to facilitate these activities. Automation should be evaluated to increase the time available for relevant student interaction. A more formalized approach and standards by grade will ensure similar activities take place for all students. In addition, focused interaction regarding graduation requirements for the earlier grades may facilitate increased student attention towards on-time graduation.

School Operations Monroe
Graduation Readiness
Summary of Recommendations

Rec#	Recommendations
1	*Establish and implement protocols and procedures for critical counseling activities expected to take place at each grade level for counselors.* *Establish and implement protocols that identify targeted minimum contact hours for students at each grade level.*
2	*Obtain training on Datacation and reassess the current practice of manually reviewing student progress via report cards.* *Increase efficiency by implementing automated practices to decrease the time required for review and to improve analysis of student performance.*
3	*Establish, implement and communicate formal monitoring procedures that will identify standard criteria when students should be monitored. This should include monitoring frequency and escalation procedures for intervention.* *Develop an intervention process that includes identification of appropriate stakeholders that should be engaged to resolve student concerns.*
4	*Establish, implement and communicate formal monitoring procedures that will identify how all students should be monitored and ensure that each student is counseled every school year.* *Develop and implement periodic consolidated reporting that identifies to the Principal, the status of counseling activities, including students with academic challenges.*
5	*Consider establishing basic student documentation standards for counseling files to facilitate staff transitions, while maintaining confidentiality of student information.*

OBSERVATION: #1

Protocols and Procedures

Formal protocols and procedures to define either the minimum contact hours or the critical activities that counselors should perform for students at each grade level did not exist. Counselors provided different levels of support, based on personal judgment and preferences. Some counselors stated that they spend considerable time on social emotional support and have little time to focus on academic achievement. Although counselors generally met with younger grades in a group setting to select schedules, they communicated that their priority remains on the higher grades, when there were several grades supported. While professional discretion is necessary, there should be minimum contact guidelines and activities that should occur at student grade levels. There should be formality and minimum contact standards to ensure students at all grade levels are receiving the appropriate level of attention. Early attention or intervention could assist the students by keeping them on track towards graduation. The delay in focused attention could miss issues that could have been remediated earlier in a student's education. Clear definition of counseling responsibilities should be outlined regarding the role the counselor should perform to contribute to academic success. Without guidelines, it is difficult to ensure that the level of support and quality of service across counselors is consistent.

RECOMMENDATIONS and MANAGEMENT RESPONSES

Establish and implement protocols and procedures for critical counseling activities expected to take place at each grade level for counselors.

Establish and implement protocols that identify targeted minimum contact hours for students at each grade level.

Management Responses:

We will formally document protocols and procedures that identify critical counseling activities and contact hours by grade for Promotion/Graduation Readiness at Monroe. Guidance will also be provided to all schools within the South Zone to ensure an effective student monitoring process.

Responsibility: Dr. Deasure Matthew, School Chief

Due Date: September 1, 2012

OBSERVATION: #2

Datacation

There was very little use of the Datacation system for monitoring student progress towards graduation. Datacation receives an electronic transfer of student grade information directly from the Chancery Student Management System. This automated system can provide accurate, timely and easy reporting. We noted that several counselors were manually reviewing more than 200 student report cards and tracking the progress manually on individual student plans. Although manual review is sometimes necessary, significant time savings would be realized by using electronic reporting from the system. Datacation not only provides useful reporting, it also includes color code alerts that identify failing students and overall monitoring reports. Utilizing the Datacation tool can provide a faster ability to measure and analyze student results in order to take concentrated actions to assist students. Use of electronic methods would allow counselors to spend more time on meaningful interactions with students at all grade levels. If the software exists to report the information in readily available format, it can make monitoring more efficient and effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS and MANAGEMENT RESPONSES

Obtain training on Datacation and reassess the current practice of manually reviewing student progress via report cards.

Increase efficiency by implementing automated practices to decrease the time required for review and to improve analysis of student performance.

Management Responses:

We will request training from Accountability to ensure that the Counselors are aware of the functionality and utilize the Datacation system. We will increase automation to allow for increased student counseling time.

Responsibility: Dr. Deasure Matthew, School Chief

Due Date: September 1, 2012

OBSERVATION: #3

Intervention Process

A comprehensive identification and communication process does not exist for academic intervention. We were unable to obtain a consistent process that would warrant intervention by the counselors, nor was intervention consistent. Each person made an independent assessment regarding the threshold for intervention and the type of intervention. This assessment included one counselor taking action only after multiple failures, when another would evaluate each failure. There were also different perspectives for aligning parents and other relevant stakeholders to remedy performance concerns. The current process for taking action and communicating with parents lacks basic standards. Parent communication could occur, but it was not always communicated amongst the various individuals with a vested interest. The type and volume of the communication varied by Counselor and Administrator. We were unable to identify school guidance that sets protocols for organizing formal intervention. Protocols that clearly define the minimum standards and timing for activities will facilitate consistent quality. Current communication practices may not be effective and opportunities to intervene for academic intervention can be missed. Expectations are not understood nor consistently applied.

RECOMMENDATIONS and MANAGEMENT RESPONSES

Establish, implement and communicate formal monitoring procedures that will identify standard criteria when students should be monitored. This should include monitoring frequency and escalation procedures for intervention.

Develop an intervention process that includes identification of appropriate stakeholders that should be engaged to resolve student concerns.

Management Responses:

We will develop, communicate and implement an intervention plan that includes all of the appropriate components of an effective student intervention plan. We will ensure that monitoring frequency and escalation procedures will be developed within the process.

Responsibility: Dr. Deasure Matthew, School Chief

Due Date: September 1, 2012

OBSERVATION: #4

Monitoring and Reporting

Standardized procedures do not exist to ensure that all students are monitored and comprehensive reporting is communicated to the Administrator. Our review noted various manual monitoring procedures that were performed. The procedures had varying degrees of completeness, consistency, and effectiveness. This was particularly evident when we compared the interaction for twelfth grade students in comparison to the other grades. There was a lack of diligence for students that were not in twelfth grade. There was a need for more consistent analysis and review of all students. There was no formal report or process to ensure that the counselor had met with all of the students in their case load. We recognize the needs vary based on grade; however, face to face contact may assist with early identification of a problem. It could also start the students thinking about on time graduation before they fall behind. There should be established monitoring procedures to ensure all students are reviewed at each grade level. The attention that is given to seniors, although critical, should be performed at all grade levels even if in varying degrees. Due to a lack of monitoring, not all students are reviewed, receiving services or being monitored.

RECOMMENDATIONS and MANAGEMENT RESPONSES

Establish, implement and communicate formal monitoring procedures that will identify how all students should be monitored and ensure that each student is counseled every school year.

Develop and implement periodic consolidated reporting that identifies to the Principal, the status of counseling activities, including students with academic challenges.

Management Responses:

We will establish, implement and communicate formal monitoring procedures to ensure that all students receive appropriate counseling interaction every school year. Reporting will be established to ensure that the Principal is aware of relevant counseling information and student concerns.

Responsibility: Dr. Deasure Matthew, School Chief

Due Date: September 1, 2012

OBSERVATION: #5

Documentation

Documentation for student files varied for each counselor. The school and District has not established protocols regarding required/suggested student documentation for counseling purposes. The student file information varied greatly and in some cases there was no correspondence in student files. We noted other files that contained significant documentation of student and guardian interaction. Until District guidelines are established, the school should establish baseline file documentation. Since counselor assignments can transition, it will facilitate seamless support for the student. Documentation maintained must consider legal and privacy issues, while ensuring adequate counseling is documented. In addition, Datacation has a notes section in which pertinent student contact could be entered by Administrators and Counselors to ensure all parties are aware of the student's status. Documentation requirements should be assessed for each grade level to ensure interaction with every student. Without standard guidelines, appropriate records and relevant information will not be available when staff transitions occur.

RECOMMENDATIONS and MANAGEMENT RESPONSES

Consider establishing basic student documentation standards for counseling files to facilitate staff transitions, while maintaining confidentiality of student information.

Management Responses:

We will evaluate key documentation that is required for student related events. We will establish a standard that will be consistently performed by Counselors at Monroe.

Responsibility: Dr. Deasure Matthew, School Chief

Due Date: September 1, 2012