

## **The Preliminary Plan to Reorganize the Clark County School District**

The plan proposed to reorganize the Clark County School District set forth in this document provides a radically different management structure and culture for the Clark County School District (CCSD) than what exists today. The plan envisions turning the present administrative structure upside down or, more accurately, right-side up, with the schools becoming front and center and at the heart of the school district's operations. The plan calls for wide involvement of frontline staff and the community in decision making. Staff will be held accountable for the results which flow from the decisions they make. Concomitantly, and of equal importance, the district will provide the framework and structure in which the schools function to achieve their results.

**The Proposal.** The responsibilities of schools must be clearly defined and the resources to achieve those responsibilities must also be assigned for planning and budgeting to the individual schools. Similarly, the responsibilities of the different offices of central administration must be clearly defined and the resources to achieve those responsibilities must be assigned for planning and budgeting to those offices. For both schools and central administrative offices, measures must be put into place to ensure performance and accountability by both the schools and central administration.

**The Requirements.** The provision of information is critical in an operation which is based on wide participation of frontline staff, parents and members of the community. **Transparency** and **timeliness** of information and operation is critical to achieve informed involvement of stakeholders.

**The Change Process.** Because of the successful pilot program with empowerment schools that was carried out in CCSD, it is not necessary to have another pilot program. Rather, the organization of the school district must facilitate the operation of the schools within the district as autonomous schools. An incremental change of schools within the CCSD to autonomous schools would likely fail. Therefore, this plan anticipates a complete change in the CCSD so that all schools within CCSD will be given autonomy similar to that which was provided to empowerment schools at the same time and each school will act as a precinct as anticipated in Assembly Bill No. 394.

**The Timeline.** The changeover requires considerable planning and installation of infrastructure to support the new structure under which CCSD will operate, but it must happen expeditiously. If a lengthier timeline were allowed, the reorganization would likely be delayed and resistance to the change would likely grow. To carry out the changes proposed in this plan, there must be a willingness and urgency to carry out the change. After consideration of the factors that would most likely result in a successful districtwide implementation, the recommendation is to carry out the plan districtwide beginning with the **2017-18 School Year**.

**The Reorganization.** This reorganization plan deals with three principle structural components of the district: The Principalship, The Superintendency, and Central Services and their inter-relationships.

**The Principalship.** In terms of accountability, the school principal is responsible for the entire school operation; an awesome charge if left to one individual. Successful schools consist of much more than a one person operation. The successful principal must reach out and embrace the involvement and contribution of staff, students, parents and community. Together the group provides much more than any one person could. Some of that involvement can be mandated, such as school empowerment teams, but there is much more to a successful school than what is mandated. Successful schools radiate a culture that permeates their everyday operation in terms of their interpersonal relationships as they pursue their work.

**The Superintendency.** Not unlike the responsibility of the principal, the responsibility of the Superintendent could be overwhelming if left to one person. The Superintendency refers to a concept wherein the Superintendent and his or her immediate staff share a common interest in the successful operation of the school district. For this to take place, the staff who are most likely to share this common interest are those who are responsible for the schools. If the staff assisting the Superintendent represent individual departments and not schools, they are less likely to think at the district level than are those who are responsible for the schools. Because the Superintendent must focus on the schools, the people working with the Superintendent must share that focus. The Superintendent must understand the needs of the schools when considering and making decisions. Accordingly, this plan includes a recommendation that the Superintendent meet regularly with those staff members who work with the principals of the schools in the district.

**Principals-Superintendency Linkage.** In a system in which individual schools exercise such a prominent role in the community, accountability of the schools to the district is achieved by a tight coupling of the school to the Superintendent through a single staff member within the central administration who is responsible for both support and supervision of schools. Each of these staff members is responsible for a specific number of assigned schools not to exceed 25 schools. The entire responsibility of this staff person is to ensure the performance of the group of schools assigned to that staff person. With this revision to the central administration, the schools no longer have multiple supervisors in the central administration. This governance structure removes the need to create an intermediate level of bureaucracy, commonly referred to as regionalization. The role and responsibility of this staff person in the reorganization would redefine the current structure of the CCSD which relies on Assistant Chiefs. Instead, this plan recommends that a new position be created with the title of **School Associate Superintendent**. This title reflects the dual nature of the person's responsibility for the schools and working with the Superintendent.

**The Central Services.** For the services that are not assigned to the schools, the central administration responsible for those services also needs to align resources to the staff with the responsibility for providing services. The staff responsible for the results must be able to plan and budget how best to achieve the desired results. The central administration will render district services such as payroll, negotiations and accounting, in a manner which is designed to assist the schools to achieve the results for which the school is responsible.

Additionally, with the central administration transferring certain day-to-day decisions to the schools, the central administration can focus on performing the tasks remaining at the district level. These tasks include establishing coherent expectations for schools, planning better allocation of resources, measuring outcomes of students, providing requested in-services, developing support systems, protocols for items such as outsourcing and school-to-pay for services and formulating policies for consideration of the Board of Trustees.

One of the issues that the central administration will face when converting to the autonomous model is that even after responsibilities and resources are devolved to the school level, there will still remain certain services for schools which schools do not need to staff at the school level. Experience shows that after schools receive their allocations of money, the schools begin to look for “free” services from the central administration and the demand for such central services increases, thereby creating a never ending spiral of demand for more “free” services. This happens in particular in areas in which there is a potential elasticity in demand. For example, there are only so many payroll checks to be written, thus there is no elasticity of demand with that service. On the other hand, the desire for more language arts consultants can result in an ever increasing demand. The solution to this situation is to create a market-driven operation in which the requests by schools for services are made on a “school-to-pay” basis. To implement such an arrangement requires that the resources that previously funded the provision of those “free” services be reallocated to the schools, which, in turn, must use those resources to purchase the services from the central administration.

**The Schools.** With an autonomous model, individual schools are moved to the front and center and at the heart of the school district’s operations. Each school is placed in a unique position to respond to local circumstances, provide an arena for the creative and innovative talent of staff and ownership for the education of the children in their community. Operating in this manner makes it easier to identify problems and provide direct solutions. The current structure instead often requires schools to go through various district offices before problems can be resolved.

**Principles of Organization.** To successfully carry out this plan, CCSD must have a clearly defined organizational plan coupled with a staff that shares the cultural values of the district in carrying out their work. Given a supportive structure, effectiveness will depend largely on the commitment and motivation of the staff. The district must approve of an explicit set of principles designed to communicate the manner in which all staff of the central administration are expected to perform. These **Principles of Organization** need to be developed, internalized and approved as a district position.

**Surveys.** The results of surveys provide a powerful tool to achieve better performance. The effectiveness of surveys, in large measure, depends on the rigor of design, the response rate, and the follow-up actions. Surveys should be administered annually toward the end of the school year. Groups surveyed should include students, staff, parents and the community. To ensure that follow-up actions may be taken, the information collected from surveys needs to be separated by individual schools and units of the central administration. All results must be public and reported separately for schools, for organizational groupings of central administration and the district.

**Training for District-wide Implementation.** Successful implementation of this plan will depend upon the preparation and training of the staff most directly involved in the transition, including staff of the central administration as well as in the schools. Because the training must precede implementation, the training must begin during the 2016-2017 School Year under the existing structure of the school district. The training program must be reality-based on the actual implementation of operating autonomous schools throughout the district. The training provided must be consistent from the Superintendent to the individual staff members in the schools and the central administration.

The training must be provided using a pyramidal model which begins with training at the top of the organization and spiraling downward. The training should be provided in related groups. For example, the supervisor and the supervised should be trained together to ensure consistency of commitments in practice. The Superintendent and the School Associate Superintendents should receive training first. During the training, the Superintendent may choose to have the group assisted by a facilitator with expertise in the operation of autonomous schools. Successful implementation relies upon establishing a common understanding and an acceptance and consistent practice of the Superintendent and the School Associate Superintendents. Different points of view may be expressed and deliberated during training, but once the common understandings are reached, the debate is over. Implementation requires consistency and adherence to the requirements for success.

Once properly trained, each School Associate Superintendent is responsible to lead the training of the principals of the schools assigned to them regarding the requirements for operating as a principal of in an autonomous school model. Associates, having gone through training, should feel comfortable providing the training to the principals without assistance of a facilitator. If the Associate does seek the assistance of a facilitator, it is important that the Associate and the principal reach a common understanding and acceptance of the autonomous school model. After training, facilitators are no longer present and ownership for successful implementation rests with those responsible in the line, i.e. the principal and School Associate Superintendent. It is very important that the requirements established apply equally to all members of the group, the supervisor and supervised. In this there is no hierarchy and it is fair game for any member to call out a member who violates the requirements. This acceptance is a true test of an organization's culture.

After the principals complete the training, the principals are responsible for communicating and arriving at a common understanding of the autonomous school model within their school communities. An on-going program should be available which involves staff, with union representation, to internalize the opportunities at the school level in decision making to serve the students in the school. Likewise, an outreach program must be in place to inform parents of the autonomous school model and the opportunities available for participation as part of a school council or as individuals in the school.

**School Program Planning and Budgeting.** The core principle of this plan for the reorganization of CCSD is the establishment school responsibility for results and aligning resources to the responsibility. This is a herculean task and each year additional clarity and refinements will be

made and there will be additional transfers of money from previous central budgets to the schools. In the first year, at a minimum, the school budget must include all staff at the school. Additionally, funds for equipment, services and supplies should be included in the school budgets. The success of school budgeting will, in large measure, be determined by the extent to which funds for school responsibilities are extracted from previous central budgets. Failing to transfer budget responsibility to the schools makes planning by the schools extremely difficult; it also results in schools constantly trying to access funds through the central administration which should have been included in the weighted school funding.

Once the school responsibilities are defined and the dollars assigned, the task of distributing the resources to the schools requires the development of allocation algorithms. This plan proposes a “Weighted Student Formula” (WSF) which is student based and coupled with other identified factors. In the development of the WSF, the goal is to distribute the existing available funds to the schools in an equitable manner. The WSF eliminates the thresholds that are inherent in a system in which the number of pupils in a school determines whether a school becomes entitled to a counselor or another administrator.

The initial development of the WSF must be based on the equitable distribution of funds existing in each of the identifiable groups: elementary school, middle school, high school, and identifiable learning groups. The issue of whether more weighting should go to one or another group is a separate consideration and should not complicate the initial development of the WSF. One of the real benefits of the WSF is that the system is less complicated and easier to understand, thereby providing for more informed involvement by staff and parents. Another benefit of the WSF is that it better informs the conversation around whether one school or another is receiving special treatment. Equally, it will be clear from the facts whether lower socio-economic neighborhood schools are being underfunded or overfunded. With this information available, value judgements and decisions will more likely be made on a rational basis rather than bias.

The process of developing the school budget must include involving the wider school community. The form of that involvement must be communicated to staff and the community. Part of that process must include communicating the allocation of money that has been made to the school, the budget development process and holding a public meeting to present the proposed budget for approval.

In preparing school budgets, the procedures and conditions must be established early to eliminate surprises. Schools must prepare balanced budgets based on allocations and staff to budget. Allocations will be reconciled to actual state count enrollments. School year-end balances will be carried forward.

**Staff Costs for Schools.** Historically, school districts have staffed schools on the basis of full time equivalents, referred to as FTEs. Staffing decisions have been made on the basis of obtaining the best teacher for the available position, regardless of salary. Because the autonomous school model converts all resources to dollars, if schools were required to determine

staff based on actual salaries, marked variation could exist in the cost to individual schools based on the composition of their staff in terms of training and experience.

The argument for using actual salaries is that it is simple and low salary schools would be able to get more staff with lower class sizes and other benefits may accrue to the school. The argument against using actual salaries, however, is that the maximum salaries are more than double the minimum salary and it would be impractical to implement such a variation based on actual salaries. No one has seriously argued that teachers receiving the maximum salary represent twice the value of teachers receiving the minimum salary. In addition, no one argues that teachers who receive the maximum salary should have twice the class size of teachers who receive the minimum salary.

The correlation between salary and teacher effectiveness, at best, is low. Furthermore, in making staffing decisions, a school should select the best teacher available for the position without compromising the decision based on salary. Attempts by schools that operate under this model to use actual salaries have not proven to be sustainable and have created administrative pressure to move teachers to other schools for the sole purpose of attempting to equalize salaries within a narrow range. Also, using actual salaries does not solve the very real problem of attracting quality teachers to schools which are considered difficult assignments.

When CCSD operated the pilot program which made certain schools within the district empowerment schools, the district used the average unit cost for each year of the program. The magnitude of change in a districtwide rollout is hardly the time to add the complexity of implementing actual salaries by a school. Therefore, this plan calls for the use of the average unit cost.

**Central Services Program Planning and Budgeting.** Budgets for the services provided by the central administration should be developed on a modified zero-based model. This is especially important since many of these budget units previously budgeted funds for the schools.

Developing a modified zero-based budget provides transparency as to what responsibilities remain in each of the budgets of the various department of the central administration.

Central budgets are not based on an allocative system. Costs are based on actuals with no provision for carry forward.

The form of modified zero-based budgeting needs to be defined by the district. Modified zero-based budgeting usually is planned on a minimum threshold of 80 to 85 percent of the previous year's budget as the base with provision to add individual standalone incremental packages not exceeding 10 percent.

**Parental and Community Engagement.** The mindset of the **Principalship** embraces the contribution of parents and the community. Parental and community involvement is not a program in isolation but rather is integral to a school's operation. As with all training programs, experts can be of assistance, but the ownership must belong to the leadership of the school.

**Parental Appeal Process.** In transitioning to an autonomous school model, it is critical that the concerns of individual parents be addressed. It is the responsibility of the principal to address parental concerns, but parents must also have the ability to appeal to the School Associate Superintendent. A protocol or mechanism may be necessary to ensure that concerns are heard, addressed and resolved. Further, it is imperative that such an avenue of resolution or redress is communicated publically.

**Principal Selection.** School staff and communities have proven to be very helpful in identifying the needs for their school when a principal vacancy occurs. However, such persons have not been very successful in selecting the principal from a list of applicants. All too often, interviews are not an effective selection process. Additionally, information on the past performance of candidates and other personnel information may not be available to the community. The person in the district who should make the appointment is the person who is responsible for removing the principal if the principal has unsatisfactory performance. After making the appointment, the person who appointed the principal is accountable to the staff and community for competent leadership at the school.

**School Year Operational Cycle.** The wider involvement, both in the schools and the central administration, in the program planning and budgeting necessitates even more attention to timelines in order to meet critical commitments. To ensure an efficient operation requires that a plan be developed detailing events, dates and responsibilities for the work prior to the school year, during the school year and finally the results review at the end of the cycle. Though the operational school year is 1 year, the entire planning and operating cycle is 2 years.

Another aspect of the 2 year cycle is the overlap of school years. While one school year is being planned, another is being carried out. This means that major changes in initiatives and priorities, as a result of the review of one year's results are then included in the planning for the following year rather than in the current year which is already in operation.

#### **Summary of Preliminary Recommendations and Timelines:**

1. Districtwide implementation of an autonomous school model for the 2017-2018 School Year, with each school designated as a precinct.
2. District program planning and budgets prepared by:
  - a. Individual schools, and
  - b. Departments of the Central Administration.
3. School budgets to be developed by March 1, 2017.
4. Budgets for services provided by the Central Administration to be developed by March 1, 2017.
5. School Teams: (to follow)
6. Training for districtwide implementation:
  - a. Superintendent and Assistant Chiefs by September 1, 2016.
  - b. Superintendent and other central staff by September 15, 2016.
  - c. School Associate Superintendents and principals by February 1, 2017.
7. School Associate Superintendents position created and staffed no later than January 1, 2017.
8. Reorganize the provision of services from the central administration with fewer direct reports to the Superintendent by August 2017.
9. Everyday usage: Change reference to CCSD to Clark County Schools effective school opening, August 2017.
10. Develop **Principles of Organization** by January 1, 2017.
11. Develop **Role and Responsibility** statements by January 1, 2017.

12. Develop **Basis for Allocation** algorithms for schools by January 1, 2017.
13. Develop **Program Planning and Budgeting Manual** by February 1, 2017.
14. Program placements for the 2017-18 School Year approved by December 1, 2016.
15. Develop surveys and manual by December 1, 2016.
16. Administer surveys by May 1, 2017.
17. Surveys results distributed by the first day of school, August 2017.