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News Alert

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South-Western City School District Receives Performance Audit

8 Noteworthy Accomplishments and 35 Best Practices

The Ohio Auditor of State's (AOS) office released the 2010 South-Western City School District (SWCS) Performance Audit on Tuesday, February 9, 2010. In July of 2009 the SWCS Board of Education engaged the Auditor of State's office to conduct a performance audit of its financial and operational management to determine whether the district's operations are efficient and management practices are effective and also to identify areas for improvement.

The AOS gathered and assessed data from SWCS, conducted interviews with district personnel; identified applicable benchmarks and leading practices; and developed a composite of ten "peer" districts from Franklin County and around the State for comparison purposes.

The Performance Audit highlights eight noteworthy accomplishments, which are practices the district demonstrates that are above and beyond best practices and should be replicated by other districts for efficiency and effectiveness. These accomplishments are in the areas of specialized instruction, providing services to special education, disabled, limited English proficient and gifted students in a cost efficient manner; workers' compensation premiums to create premium discount opportunities; enrollment projections prepared annually for each building and the district in total; classroom inventory and building utilization committee to ensure buildings are utilized efficiently and operate in a cost effective manner; transportation plan that methodically examines eligibility boundaries that attain savings while maintaining the safety of students; network infrastructure allowing for a closely managed network operation equipped with remote access technology to push updates and images to computers via the network; software application integration to reduce the need for multiple and redundant data entry processes; and technology inventory system for remote response to prioritize and respond to technology support issues.

The district was also recognized for 35 best practices, where district processes were in line with benchmark or standard organizational practices. Four leading practices were found in the area of financial systems including financial management, ethics, purchasing policies, forecasting, budgeting and textbook, transportation, custodial and maintenance inventory controls. Five leading practices were noted in the area of human resources including staffing levels based on FTEs per 1,000 students educated, comparable substitute teacher pay rates, extracurricular activities per students expenditures, vocational program expenditures, and information provided on the board of education and its workings. Five leading practices were identified in the facilities area including the new employee shadowing process, energy management practices, maximized purchasing power, building utilization, and compensation for custodians and head custodians. Four leading practices were cited in the transportation area including policies in line with State requirements, security of fleet, equipment and supplies, lower purchasing costs than both peer districts and industry standard, and preventative maintenance. Six best practices were noted in the food services area such as employee handbooks, safety and security training, meal price evaluation, school lunch participation exceeding peer averages,

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cost containment of supplies and materials, and reimbursement submission for the National School Lunch Program. Eleven best practices are employed in the technology area such as a comprehensive technology plan, staffing levels of 1 technician per 487 computers, professional development, sufficient bandwidth capabilities, use of off-peak hours for system updates, uniform equipment standards for purchases, minimum equipment standards for donated equipment, and software bundles.

The Performance Audit identifies 28 key recommendations for improvement in the areas of financial and strategic management, human resource management, facilities, food service, transportation, and technology management for the district to consider. Six of the recommendations are related to future contract negotiations. Seven of the recommendations have financial implications.

The AOS reports that the district could save approximately \$728,000 per year from the general fund if all of the non-negotiated recommendations are implemented including the recommendation to implement a five year technology replacement schedule. Those recommendations include developing a detailed, multi-year strategic plan, creating an internal auditor position; establishing a formal process for updating the employee handbook; reducing maintenance and operations staff by 15.5 FTEs; developing a formal facilities master plan, eliminating the use of seasonal staff; reducing nine buses and reviewing bell schedules to maximize triple routing for actual bus riders; allocating a portion of utility and refuse removal costs to the food service fund; reducing 45.5 labor hours from daily food service operations; plus funding a five-year replacement cycle for technology hardware. A detailed accounting of all of the recommendations can be found within the full report.

Superintendent Dr. Bill Wise said, "It is nice to have the positive aspects of our operations reinforced by the Auditor's Office. In addition, the Auditor's office provided us with further opportunities for efficiency that will allow us to make even better use of taxpayer dollars moving forward," Wise noted.

Treasurer Hugh Garside pointed out, "The audit affirms that we currently have financial efficiencies in place as evidenced by comparing our per pupil expenditure to the peer districts and the state average." "The savings recommended by the auditor's office would not have been sufficient to keep the district off the ballot this past year, but will be crucial in keeping our financial commitment to our community in the future," said Garside.

The district has indicated that it is committed to managing long term plans and will be developing a plan in response to the Performance Audit recommendations with input from the community.

The district has invited community members to attend Conversations with the Community on Thursday, February 11 to share in the audit findings and assist with the planning process. The community forum will be held at the South-Western Career Academy, 4750 Big Run South Road, Grove City at 7 p.m.

The full text of the SWCS Performance Audit can be found on the Ohio Auditor of State's Web site at <http://www.auditor.state.oh.us/auditsearch/detail.aspx?ReportID=79644>.