



May 26, 2015

Shuler Education Center

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Scott Frank
Legislative Post Auditor
Legislative Division of Post Audit
800 Southwest Jackson St., Suite 1200
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Mr. Frank:

The administration and Board of Education of USD 437, Auburn-Washburn Unified School District, would like to thank you and your staff for your continued commitment to providing opportunities for school districts to reflect on current practices and consider potential efficiencies to improve all aspects of our operations. Your auditors were respectful, professional, and responsive to our questions and always sought to understand our practices and policies throughout the process. We believe in continuous improvement and set high standards for ourselves. Feedback is always our friend and we know that our community expects us to not only provide exceptional educational services to our students, but to always seek out best practices and be good stewards of our resources. We would also like to thank you for allowing us to postpone the LPA efficiency audit until after the IRS audit was completed last spring.

We have reviewed the audit report and the recommendations and offer the following:

Recommendation: Because of the potential for reducing costs with little to no impact on educational services provided to students, the Auburn-Washburn District **should implement** the following actions:

- 1.) Reduce custodial costs by eliminating 5.0-8.5 custodial positions to align current staffing levels with peers or national benchmarks.**

A correlation exists between the cleanliness of school facilities and students' academic achievements. A study conducted in 2008 through the Center for Facilities Research at APPA (Association of Physical Plant Managers) and co-sponsored by ISSA (Worldwide Cleaning Industry Association) reported that a lack of cleanliness becomes a distraction at Level 3, which is defined as casual inattention in their report. Cleanliness ranked as the fourth most important building element to impact students' personal learning after noise, air temperature, and lighting. The district has worked closely with Pure-O-





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Zone for the past 5 years to become more efficient in our cleaning practices and raise the level of sanitation and cleanliness in all of our buildings. We changed our job “tasks” for building custodians to become more efficient and follow best practices. We have also implemented team cleaning during the year and crew cleaning during the summer in an effort to use our existing staff most efficiently and maintain our higher standards of building cleanliness.

Even though we are committed to keeping our standards high, we will not fill the current 4.5 vacant positions which will reduce our staffing in order to reduce costs. The Auburn-Washburn community, including parents, students, and staff, have high expectations for clean buildings. Our patrons have invested in the facilities financially through bond elections and personally take great pride in their modern and clean neighborhood schools. We want to honor their trust that we will take good care of our buildings. The district will reduce custodians by 4.5 and monitor building cleanliness and patron satisfaction.

2.) Develop a strategy to align supplemental pay with league peers.

Auburn-Washburn has a unique approach to determining supplemental salary for coaches and sponsors. Supplemental salary calculations are based on a percentage of a staff member’s current salary. This practice has been in place for over 30 years and is clearly not a common methodology for determining a coaching or sponsor salary in our league or across the state. Salary is a mandatorily negotiable item. The Board of Education has asked AWFNEA (Auburn-Washburn National Education Association) to re-consider this practice previously with no success. We have listed it again this year as an item to be negotiated. The district is interested in finding a solution that will be fair and equitable, but also reasonable, for those veteran staff members who have devoted a significant amount of their personal time to creating opportunities for students to find a niche for themselves in extracurricular activities.

3.) Develop a strategy to maximize procurement card use.

The district had some general misgivings and apprehensions regarding this recommendation. The primary concern was the vivid memory of how the City of Topeka was accused in the local media for improper use of P-Cards. Those stories were reported for months. The belief that P-Cards can be abused more easily because of a perceived lack of oversight and internal controls made us uncomfortable. We realize that procurement cards can reduce the cycle time of purchasing transactions and can provide a cash rebate. We have done some research and are willing to pilot a Purchase Card





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Program with our maintenance staff this fall as soon as we have developed stringent, safe, and secure procedures for oversight.

Recommendation: Because of the potential for impact on students or the community, the Auburn-Washburn School District should consider implementing the following cost savings options:

4.) Replace four school nurses with health aides.

The role of the school nurse in our district has multiple components and is dependent on many factors including the health needs of the student population and the availability of specialized instructional student support services and programs. We have several buildings with increasingly large numbers of severely multiply handicapped students and students with chronic health needs such as asthma, diabetes, and serious food allergies. Our nurses provide quality health care and intervene with actual and potential health problems that far exceed having a basic knowledge of first aid and CPR. They distribute medications throughout the day, develop health care plans for at-risk students, engage in health screenings that include vision and hearing, and monitor immunizations. The school nurse has health expertise that is essential to school educational teams and can be the liaison between families and their medical homes. Our nurses give our families a deep sense of comfort that their children are being well taken care of at school. Many of our parents have health-care backgrounds. They appreciate having a licensed nurse in our school buildings. We would have no support for replacing a significant number of our school nurses with health aides. We do have one vacancy in a small special purpose school that is near the high school and middle school. It is our intent to advertise for a CNA/CMA and pilot having a health aide vs. a licensed school nurse in that building this next school year.

5.) Change the district's current busing policies for students who live less than 2.5 miles from school by:

a. eliminating transportation services for regular education students who live less than 2.5 miles from school,

The district has offered free transportation to all students, regardless of where they resided in the district, since the late 1990's. The Board had deep concerns about student safety and equity and made a conscious decision to absorb the cost of transporting students for those reasons. Our student population has grown significantly since then and there is no reimbursement for transporting students who live within a 2.5 mile radius of their assigned school, so the Board has reluctantly given





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consideration to eliminating transportation to save costs. The issue that has not changed is the location of our schools; they are on highly traveled streets without stoplights or crosswalks. Even if there were crosswalks and crossing guards, traffic could not easily be controlled safely on heavily trafficked thoroughfares such as 29th Street or Wanamaker Rd. There is no safe option. Parents were asked to respond to the question about eliminating transportation in order to save costs for those students living closer than 2.5 miles from their schools on a scientific survey we conducted in April of 2015. This was, by far, the least popular option for reducing expenses. The Board would not eliminate transportation unless there were absolutely no other viable options to save expenses.

Or

b. Charging parents an annual fee to provide transportation services to students who live less than 2.5 miles from school.

The district currently charges a fee to those students who live out of the district and wish to ride a bus to school. They locate the most convenient USD 437 bus stop and we transport them to their schools. It has been a challenge to collect that fee. Even so, the Board has given more thought to charging district parents a transportation fee since it has become a common practice in other districts outside of Shawnee County as a cost saving measure. We would likely be the first district in Shawnee County to charge that fee and we would have some resistance. Our parents/patrons have had access to free transportation for many years. In the survey mentioned previously, our patrons were not eager to be assessed a transportation fee, but it seemed to be tolerated more than eliminating busing altogether. As the student population has grown and the cost of transporting all students has increased significantly, the district has considered this option several times. It would be an option to be evaluated when all other options had been exhausted.

In summary, we appreciated the opportunity to participate in the Efficiency Audit and enjoyed working with the team of auditors who spent time with us. The district will begin to implement those items noted as “low impact” relatively quickly. We also do not request permission to present prepared remarks, but district officials will be present to answer questions when the report is presented to the Legislative Post Audit Committee. This has been a valuable experience.

Sincerely,

Dr. Brenda S. Dietrich, Superintendent



Itemized Response to LPA Recommendations

Audit Title: K-12 Education : Efficiency Audit of the Auburn-Washburn School District

LPA Recommendation	Agency Action Plan
1. To comply with the requirements of K.S.A 46-1133, district officials should post a copy of the completed performance audit on the district's website.	The district will post a completed copy of the Performance Audit as soon as it is available and approved.
Because of the potential for reducing costs with little to no impact on education services provided to students, the Auburn-Washburn school district <u>should implement</u> the following actions:	
2. Reduce custodial costs by eliminating 5.0 to 8.5 custodial positions to align current staffing levels with peers or national benchmarks.	The district currently has 4.5 custodial positions unfilled. We will use that opportunity to reduce our custodial staffing levels as recommended while striving to maintain current cleanliness standards at the level our community expects.
3. Develop a strategy to align supplemental pay with league peers.	The Board of Education has listed the Supplemental Pay Schedule as an item to negotiate for SY 2015-2016. Specifically, we wish to explore other options for determining how supplemental pay is determined and distributed. It is our goal to discuss this and hopefully, come to an agreement that will be mutually satisfactory to all parties.
4. Develop a strategy to maximize procurement card use.	The district will replace current credit cards with the Purchase Card Program on a pilot basis with maintenance staff and develop policies and procedures prior to implementing the system. We expect to implement the pilot by the fall of 2015.
Because of the potential for impact on students or the community the district <u>should consider</u> implementing the following cost savings options:	
5. Replace four school nurses with health aides.	The district has had either an RN or a BSN in all of our buildings since 2002. Our school nurses manage children's increasingly complex medical conditions, chronic health illnesses, required screenings, and monitor immunizations closely. They provide a level of care that our families have come to expect. Even though our neighboring districts may have health clerks rather than licensed nurses, the district is uncomfortable making significant reductions in the level of care we provide to our students. We have one open nursing position in a small special purpose school that is less than 1,000 feet from the high school and middle school. We will consider posting that position as a Health Aide with CNA/CMA qualifications.
6. Change the district's current busing policies for students who live less than 2.5 miles from school by:	
a. eliminating transportation services for regular education students who live less than 2.5 miles from school, or	The district is unwilling to eliminate transportation for those students who live less than 2.5 miles from school at this point in time based on student safety issues and the survey responses received from 1,000 participants this past April. This was a very unpopular option. We have few sidewalks, our schools are mostly located on major thoroughfares, and there would be major congestion if parents all drove their children to school. This option would be considered only after all other alternatives had been exhausted and would be weighed against safety concerns.
b. charging parents an annual fee to provide transportation services to students who live less than 2.5 miles from school.	The district currently charges a fee to students who live out of the district and ride a bus to school from the most convenient USD437 bus stop for their family. It has been very challenging to collect the fee in a timely manner. Even with those challenges, the district would rather consider charging a fee to in-district students living within 2.5 miles than eliminating transportation. This option will be considered when all other revenue generating and expense reduction options have been exhausted.