

Using the Instructional Audit for Policy and Program Improvement



An audit by an outside expert yields a detailed report of recommended changes and of what a school district is doing right.

Do you consider instruction to be your top priority—more important than the business and financial operations of your school district? Do you spend thousands of dollars on experts to evaluate your financial and accounting transactions to prove that your fiscal practices are productive and credible? Would you like to have school employees and your community feel that your instructional practices are equally productive and credible? Consider conducting an instructional audit.

The instructional audit is an investigation by an external instructional specialist who samples all available data related to instruction, identifies areas where data are lacking, and directly observes instructional and administrative processes related to instruction. The investigation ends with a detailed written report of the condition of the district's instructional programs and practices and with recommendations for improvement. It also includes a confidential management letter to the superintendent, which provides specific suggestions and processes to carry out improvements in crucial areas.

Financial audits are performed on the basis of standards widely accepted by national auditing associations. Since no universally accepted standards yet exist for instruction, the standards relied upon must be derived from current research, theory, and exemplary practices on learning, teaching, instructional leadership, and effective schools.

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Elements of an Instructional Audit

All instructional programs are composed of elements that are human, process, or structure-related. The most productive instructional programs use process elements to maintain an appropriate balance between the human and structural elements. The instructional auditor identifies and examines the internal and external items that make up the human, process, and structural elements of the district's instructional program. Figure 1 lists the items that should generally be examined in an instructional audit.



Figure 1. Audit Guide.

Board of Education Policies

- Curriculum development
- Research and development
- Selection of instructional materials
- Teaching controversial issues
- Procedures for handling complaints and appeals
- Testing program
- Effective instructional practices
- Selecting and using instructional consultants
- Staff development
- Quality of work life
- Teacher supervision and evaluation
- Homework
- Grading and reporting to parents

Job Descriptions

- Teachers
- Principals
- Instructional administrators
- Curriculum specialists
- Superintendent
- Instructional aides

Budget Allocations

- To instructional accounts
- To instructional research and development
- To curriculum development
- To staff development

Negotiated Contracts

- Academic freedom
- Curriculum development
- Staff evaluation
- Staff development
- Class size

Communication

- Employee newsletters
- Community newsletters
- Media coverage
- News releases
- Student surveys
- Community surveys
- Employee surveys
- Support groups
- Advisory councils

Instruction

- Test scores
- Cost per unit of instruction
- Allocated time
- Instructional time
- Academic learning time
- Curriculum guides
- Lesson plans
- Percentage of students receiving failing grades
- School climate
- Citizen volunteers
- Curriculum council
- Mission and goals
- Effective instructional practices
- Instructional supervision
- Classroom management/discipline

Elections

- Operational millages—passed or failed, percentage of favorable votes
- Bond issues—passed or failed, percentage of favorable votes

Students

- Retention rate
- Absenteeism
- Suspension rate
- Expulsion rate
- Drop out rate
- Percent attending private schools
- Age-grade distribution

Employees

- Absenteeism
- Grievances
- Assignments outside of certification
- Assignments outside of experience
- Quality of work life

Administration

- Delegation of authority
- Fit of authority to responsibility



“The instructional audit provided the impetus for an unequaled emphasis on instruction in the Whitmore Lake School District.”

Figure 2 shows the human, process, and structural relationships of the items.

Specifics to be included in the audit and decisions as to who receives the various items of information need to be negotiated between the superintendent and the auditor. In addition, because the instructional audit is likely to lead to follow-up improvement activities, it should be decided at the time of contracting for the audit whether or not the outside instructional auditor will continue in such support roles as: (1) policy writing advisor to the superintendent or the district's policy writer; (2) inservice trainer of teachers and administrators in deficient areas; and (3) program developer of curricular or management areas found to be lacking.

Obviously, each superintendent and each auditor may wish to add to, modify, or subtract from the list provided in the audit guide in Figure 1. The local district may choose a comprehensive audit, or it may choose from any of the components listed in the audit guide. The local district also may choose to: (1) merely have a review with recommendations listed; (2) add the development of a plan to overcome identified deficiencies; and (3) add post-audit consultant and training services.

Conducting an Instructional Audit

The following is a step-by-step schedule of how the Whitmore Lake School District carried out its instructional audit.

1. The superintendent, Gail Stephens, contracted with an independent consultant, Jerry Herman, to conduct the majority of the instructional audit. Because of budget and time considerations, items from the audit guide were prioritized.

2. The superintendent and the auditor reviewed the items on the audit guide to determine: for which items existing data were available; in which areas data could be easily retrieved if simple collection devices were devel-

Figure 2. Instructional Elements.

	Human Elements	Process Elements	Structure Elements
Internal	<i>Examples:</i> Employee surveys Student complaints Grievances	<i>Examples:</i> Academic learning time School climate projects Teaching to objectives	<i>Examples:</i> Board of education policies Curriculum guides Budget allocations
External	<i>Examples:</i> Community surveys School elections	<i>Examples:</i> Media coverage Citizen volunteers	<i>Examples:</i> Private school enrollment Tax rates

“The audit provides a snapshot in time of the condition of instructional programs and practices.”

oped; which items required actual observation by the auditor; and which items lacked sufficient data for a valid analysis.

Obviously, some items had to be examined while school was in session; for example, the process element dealing with the use of school time. Some items could be examined from existing data; for example, allocated time data were available on the State of Michigan's annual report form. Examining the use of instructional time required the development of a standard reporting format, but once the form was developed and completed the data could be analyzed at any time. Analysis of academic learning time, however, required that engagement rate observations be conducted by the instructional auditor while students were in class.

3. Once the audit content and data collection schedule had been developed, the superintendent prepared the instructional staff for the audit. Teachers were informed that the auditor would be conducting engagement rate observations in their classrooms and were assured that the data collected would be used to establish a districtwide baseline measure and would not be used for individual evaluation purposes. Individual teachers who requested their own engagement rate data could arrange to obtain it and to have a brief consultation with the auditor. Administrators were informed of what data would be retrieved from their files and what the audit timeline would be. Explaining the audit content and process to the staff and providing opportunities for the staff to meet informally with the auditor in the early stages of the audit prevented some of the discomfort that is to be expected whenever the most human elements of a school district are scrutinized.

4. The audit was conducted by reviewing information on file and by direct observation. Where the data base was large, the auditor drew samples for analysis.

Items that the auditor investigated fell into the following nine categories:

Board of Education. The auditor analyzed existing policies that related to instruction and identified areas for which policies should be developed. Although the auditor made suggestions, both he and the superintendent

felt that the local authorities should actually write the policies.

Job Description. The auditor reviewed the instruction-related elements of administrative job descriptions, suggested additions, and recommended writing additional job descriptions.

Budget Expenditures. The history of the district's instructional expenditures was reviewed and compared with other Michigan school districts.

Master Contracts. The auditor analyzed the contracts with unionized employees to determine where and how they affected the instructional program.

Internal and External Communications. The auditor reviewed the methods the district used to communicate with students, staff, and the public, and made suggestions for improvement.

Instructional Monitoring and Delivery Systems. This major section of the audit included review of the test data, student and employee attendance data, use of instructional time, curriculum development, use of effective teaching behaviors, and school climate data.

Elections. The auditor analyzed the history of voter support for school levy issues.

Administrative Authority. Policies, contracts, and other structures that establish and control administrators' authority related to instructional matters were reviewed.

Staff Development. The auditor reviewed the content, participation, and evaluations of the instruction-related staff development program and made suggestions, based on classroom observation, for additional training programs.

For each of these areas, the auditor's report outlined the existing status of the items under review and presented suggestions for such things as obtaining data, improving programs, and developing policies and guidelines. For example, the auditor:

- Recommended negotiating stronger qualification requirements for the reduction in force section of the teacher master contract and suggested items related to teacher evaluation that should be incorporated in the procedure for reduction in force.

- Suggested a detailed analysis for the reading program at specified grade levels.

- Recommended specific inquiries for determining causes of student absenteeism.

- Suggested specific methods of increasing academic learning time without increasing the school day or year.

- Provided recommendations for improving curriculum and the curriculum development process.

- Constructed a sample instructional task matrix to delineate the responsibility and authority of the people who share in instructional decision making.

- Proposed 13 new and revised Board of Education policies to establish an operational framework for the district's instructional program, which covered: mission and goals, school climate, mastery learning, time for learning, testing/monitoring programs, effective instructional practices, enrichment and accelerated learning programs, homework, curriculum development, teacher supervision and evaluation, attendance, grading and reporting to parents, and graduation requirements.

Effective Instructional Practices Policy

Whitmore Lake Public Schools Whitmore Lake, Michigan

Instruction

Effective Instructional Practices

POLICY: Education theory and research have identified certain teaching behaviors and classroom management techniques which are consistently related to increasing student achievement. In order to provide Whitmore Lake students with the highest quality instruction, it shall be the responsibility of the administration to identify such practices and cause them to be implemented in the district's classrooms.

The staff development program, the teacher supervision and evaluation process, and the testing/monitoring system shall all support the implementation of the most current effective instructional practices.

POLICY

ADOPTED: 10/10/83

RULES AND REGULATIONS:

1. All teachers shall be provided the opportunity to participate in the Effective Instructional Practices inservice program.
2. All teachers shall be expected to incorporate the following instructional skills in their daily teaching:
 - a. Selecting instructional objectives at the correct level of difficulty.
 - b. Teaching to the objective using relevant teacher behaviors and eliciting relevant student behaviors.
 - c. Monitoring students' learning and adjusting instruction appropriately.
 - d. Effectively using the principles of learning that affect motivation, rate and degree of learning, retention, and increasing productive behavior.
3. Teachers shall be encouraged to assist each other to improve their instructional skills through peer observation and conferencing.
4. Principals shall make instructional supervision a top priority and shall devote the necessary time and attention to (1) adequately develop instructional supervision skills, (2) observe in classrooms, and (3) meet and confer with teachers to assist them to improve instructional skills.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

ACKNOWLEDGED: 10/10/83

What the Instructional Audit Accomplished

The instructional audit provided the impetus for an unequaled emphasis on instruction in Whitmore Lake. Immediately after accepting the audit, the Board of Education disseminated the 13 proposed policies and arranged for their review by citizens and staff. With the exception of the graduation requirements policy, which was tabled for further study, the policies were quickly adopted. The following implementation strategies and activities demonstrate the magnitude of the effort.

Board of Education Retreat. The Board of Education participated in a weekend retreat with an external consultant for the purpose of selecting district goals for a three-year period. Two of the goals selected were to prepare a three-year plan for curriculum development to implement mastery learning and to establish a format for reviewing and revising graduation requirements.

Administrative Performance Objectives. Principals attempted the following performance objectives for the year:

- Design and implement a building-level school learning climate enhancement program.

- Improve student attendance.
- Develop and utilize clinical supervision skills to effectively assist teachers to improve their instructional practices.

Curriculum Development. Teacher learning arts and math committees

prepared and conducted a program to revise student learning objectives for a mastery learning program. The format developed by these two initial committees will soon be followed in other subject areas.

Staff Development. The district provided research-based effective instructional practices training for all K-12 teachers and clinical supervision training for all interested teachers.

Grading and Reporting to Parents. A teacher committee was established to develop a reporting system for the mastery learning program.

Homework. The Community School Advisory Councils developed district-wide rules and regulations for homework for all students.

Advantages and Disadvantages of an Instructional Audit

Based on our experience at Whitmore Lake, we conclude that an instructional audit has the following advantages and disadvantages.

An audit can be beneficial in that it:

1. Is conducted by an external expert who has no vested interest in the past or current instructional program of the school district.

2. Provides a snapshot in time of the condition of instructional programs and practices.

3. Is based on standards derived from current research, theory, and exemplary practices on learning, teaching, and effective schools.

4. Reports what is right as well as what is in need of improvement.

5. Provides a sound basis for determining priorities among needed program improvements and allocating required resources.

Some disadvantages of inviting such close examination are:

1. The auditor must be knowledgeable in all elements of instruction, possess adequate research skills, and be able to concisely articulate findings from a complex operational system.

2. The audit may disturb the status

quo, and change is difficult for some people to accept.

3. The audit may disclose deficiencies that some people would rather not address.

4. The publicity surrounding the audit may cause political discomfort to the Board of Education, administration, unions, or employees.

A Wealth of Information

The Board of Education, administration, staff, and citizens of the Whitmore Lake School District determined to develop a responsive, continually improving educational system. The instructional audit provided a wealth of information to assist the district in establishing responsible goals, developing effective programs, and monitoring results. Instruction is clearly placed as the top priority, and its soundness, credibility, productivity, and effectiveness will be continually assessed. The result: excellence in planning and monitoring and predictability in achievements. □

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