

Lake Washington's Master Plan— A System for Growth

With the guidance of a districtwide plan that balances central office and building-based management, the school district in Kirkland, Washington, has achieved dramatic improvements.

Eleven years ago, Lake Washington School District was in a state of turmoil: the quality of education was perceived to be poor, parents and community members were highly dissatisfied, employees were jealous and distrustful, and the relationship between the teachers' union and the administration was adversarial.

Today things are different. Lake Washington School District has strong community support: our Parent-Teacher-Student Association has 9,000 members—the largest in the state; bond issues and levies pass with 80 to 85 percent margins; location within the district is a "selling point" for homes; and businesses often initiate partnerships with the schools. The district was one of four recognized by the RAND Corporation in a nationwide study on teacher evaluation, and four of our schools have received excellence awards from the U.S. Office of Education. In addition, the teachers' union has just signed an extension to a three-year contract, guaranteeing two more years of harmony.

These dramatic changes resulted from the implementation of a districtwide master plan affecting every employee, every position, and every function of the school district.

Planning for Change

The Lake Washington master plan balances building-based decision making and administrative input, encourages

collegiality, and is responsive to change. For each building, the district master plan is mirrored by a locally developed master plan, and each teacher is also developing a plan for his or her classroom.

The customary first step in master planning is to determine the needs of

the community and develop a mission statement. Before we developed our master plan, we conducted a school climate survey, a parent survey, and a student needs assessment. Based on the results, we adopted a mission statement emphasizing "what's best for the kids."

Photographs by Robb Mitchell



The leadership model based on a task/time analysis helped principals compare their daily activities to a standard, as discussed here by L. E. Scarr (standing), Barbara Comer, and Al Bloomquist.

We wanted a master plan that would be responsive to changing needs and situations. Therefore, we emphasized relationships and interactions rather than rigid hierarchical structures or rules, believing that people are more flexible than policies and procedures. We also developed operating principles that are people-oriented, providing guidelines for communication in areas such as cooperation, support, loyalty, disagreement, and initiative. For example, one of the guidelines on loyalty reads, "When we disagree, we will focus on issues, not people, and we will be open and honest. Each individual will use a process to resolve conflicts that is fair, just, and sensitive to the integrity of other people."

The Master Plan

The main functions of the master plan are to provide direction and encourage people to see the gestalt of the workings of the district, to climb the "mental ladder" to get a better view of the interactions of the various parts of the whole. The plan provides a framework that defines daily operations and creates a sense of belonging through group decision making, common goals, and an emphasis on the synergistic relationship between the central administration and the building principals.

Lake Washington's master plan has 10 components, which can be divided into three broad categories: planning, action, and accountability (see fig. 1). The planning function includes community needs assessment, annual goals, budget allocation, and district policy. The action function includes principal expectations and development, staff expectations and development, job description, staff selection, and program. The accountability function provides evaluation guidelines.

The final document serves as both a map and a set of guidelines for planned change. Yearly goals are established with input from faculty, administration, school board, community, and students. These goals reflect the changing needs of the district as a whole. Upon adoption by the school board, these goals become the job descriptions for the administrative staff for the coming year.

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In addition to these 1-year goals, 5-year projections and 6- to 20-year visions guide our long-range planning. Long-term goals include planning specifically for facilities, instructional programs, implementation of technology, and total integration of a new core curriculum and essential skills training.

Master plans for the individual schools are similar to the district plan, with 10 parallel components (see fig. 2). At the building level, planning teams include teachers, staff members, the principal, and sometimes students and the community. Specific school goals are developed based on district goals, forming the job expectations for the principal and staff for the coming year.

Principal Task/Time Analysis

To help principals develop planning skills, we used a task/time analysis. Principals kept a log of their activities over a two-week period. Then central office administrators and principals developed a task/time model reflecting the ideal breakdown of activities during a day: instructional program development and assessment (24 percent), staff development and evaluation (24 percent), student services (20 percent), positive school/community climate (20 percent), personal growth (8 percent), and operations (4 percent). Comparing how principals actually spent their time with this model indicated changes necessary

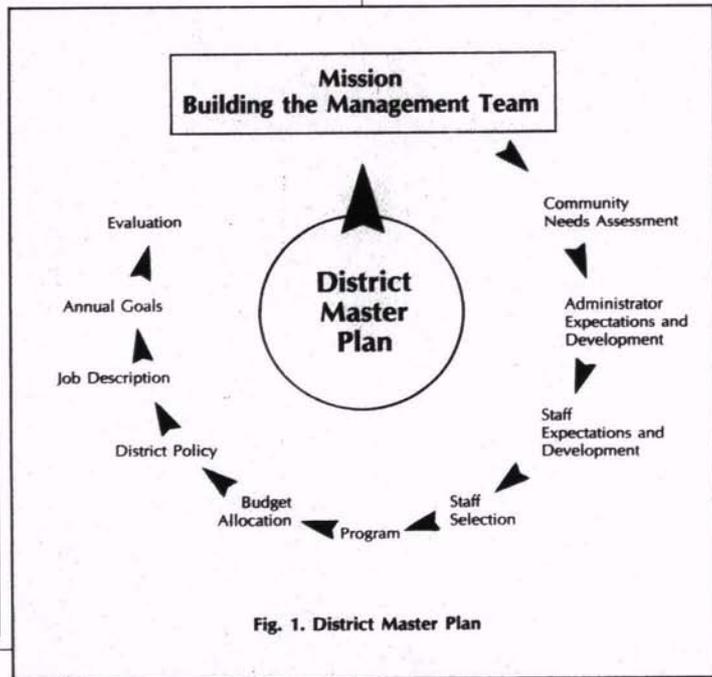


Fig. 1. District Master Plan

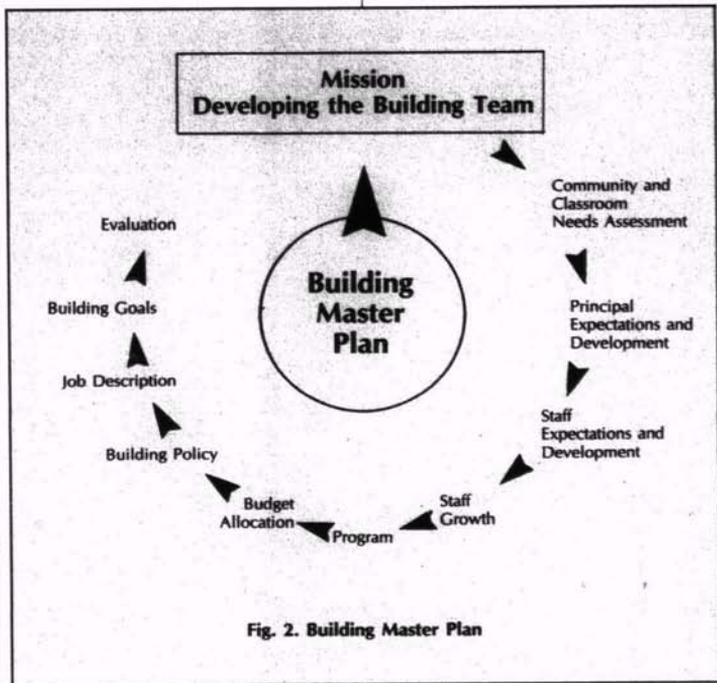


Fig. 2. Building Master Plan

Specific school goals are developed based on district goals, forming the job expectations for the principal and staff for the coming year.

implementing a marketing plan." The principal responds to this and the task/time model by asking for faculty input and writing the proposed plan and implementation timeline. Upon approval by the central administration, the plan is carried out according to schedule.

"Marketing plans" include the usual things, such as weekly coffees for 15-20 parents at a time; monthly open houses for parents and community members designed around specific themes or programs; encouragement of teacher/parent school newsletters and brochures. But now each school has a marketing plan that supports the school goals and is uniquely fitted to the needs of the community. Some plans demonstrate considerable creativity and involve community members in both planning and implementation.

to realize the ideal. This comparison resulted in additional secretarial support in all schools, a role redefinition so regular secretaries could assume more management responsibilities in the elementary schools, and the addition of an associate principal in each high school to provide instructional leadership.

The ideal relative time spent on each task reflects an emphasis on leadership. For example, ideally only 4 percent of a principal's time will involve operations while 20 percent of his or her time will be devoted to creating a positive school/community climate—requiring such skills as motivation, promotion, communicating, and networking.

The task/time model, combined with the building master plan, has helped principals pursue district goals while allowing them to assess their own daily activities. The model helps them concentrate on their most important function: supervision of quality instruction for every child every day.

Building-Based Management

The key to this plan is the autonomy with which each principal structures his or her master plan. One of the district directives is that each principal should "develop community support for school and district programs by



Marcia Morrison, principal of Redmond Elementary School, Kirkland, Washington, shows a class their display photograph, taken to commemorate the school's special recognition from the U.S. Department of Education.

The third function of the district master plan is evaluation. Principals are evaluated by central office administrators based on the outcomes of the building master plans and the accomplishment of the action plans. The question is not only, "Did you do it?" but "Did it work?" and "What evidence is there that it was successful?" Principals in turn evaluate teachers based on an instructional skills model used within the district.

Every employee in the Lake Washington School District is evaluated at least once a year, with the individual's job description used as a criterion. The evaluation program is coupled with flexible staff development options oriented toward helping district personnel reach their full potential both personally and professionally. Pre- and post-evaluation conferences are required, and all "unsatisfactory" ratings are remedied with a supportive development plan.

Lake Washington's master plan works because it achieves balance between central office and building-based management.

The Plan Works, but Why?

The formula for developing and implementing a district master plan is simple and straightforward: develop a mission statement, establish goals, outline activities to meet the goals, and evaluate the results. To effect remark-

able changes in your school district, you must be committed to hiring the best people; providing training, development, and support for all staff; then *trusting* them to do their jobs. This means not only trusting the people themselves but trusting your own staff selection and evaluation processes.

Lake Washington's master plan works because it achieves balance between central office and building-based management. The staff, following the same plan and process at all levels, has developed programs, found creative ways to solve problems, and established community ties—advances that could never have been achieved by directives from the central office. With the guidance of our master plan, we have transformed an ineffective district into a model for excellence. □

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