

Brookfield-LaGrange Park School District #95  
Superintendent's 2014-2015 Mid-Year Report

Dr. Mark Kuzniewski  
January 29, 2015

## Superintendent Mid-Year Report, 2014-2015

### **Introduction:**

The main focus of this Mid-Year report is two-fold. It provides an update as to the progress on the goals established between the superintendent and the Board. Second, it provides a summary overview as to the financial status, instructional strength, and status of the physical plant for the district.

First, three broad goals were established between the Board and superintendent. They included:

- 1) Outline vision, to enhance administrative efficiencies through the use of technology and to address the use of technology in curriculum and instructional practice.
- 2) Provide ongoing assessment, evaluation, and recommendations relative to the instructional programming of the District.
- 3) Provide ongoing assessment, evaluation, and recommendations relative to the operations of the district.

Although the goals are broad, there have been certain key areas focus established for each goal. These key areas are addressed in detail in PART ONE of this report.

This report also serves to provide pertinent information relative to the financial status of the district, the instructional strength of the district, and the status of our physical plant. This information is reported in PART TWO of this report.

## **PART ONE:**

### **Review of Superintendent's Goals:**

The primary work that has taken place to accomplish the three goals is detailed in the following section. Although key work has been indentified that supports each goal, it is important to remember that this work is not inclusive of everything done to support that goal. Indeed the day-to-day operations also support the goals.

**Goal One:** Outline vision, to enhance administrative efficiencies through the use of technology and to address the use of technology in curriculum and instructional practice.

#### *Key Areas of Focus:*

- Create Job Descriptions for potential positions
- Recommend personnel structure that enhances IT technical and instructional performance
- Develop a technology direction for the district

In March of 2014 the District received the results of an independent audit that provided insight into the status of the District's technology infrastructure, its personnel structure, a prioritization of work, and surface level estimates for work that District should consider tackling in the very near future. The audit confirmed the previous recommendation made in December 2013 to the Board to add to our existing technology staff a director type of position. To that end a personnel structure that included a Technology Director and a Technician was developed. Job descriptions were created for the positions that essentially included the Technology Director serving to oversee the major technology initiatives of the District and the Technician working as the "break-fix" person. Due to our District being small, it was understood that the Technology Director would also do work related to installation of network equipment and could also serve to "break-fix" equipment. The Board accepted the personnel structure and job descriptions and the two positions were filled in the summer of 2014.

In August 2014 at its committee of the whole meeting, the Board had an opportunity to see the technology plan that was created to address the issues outlined in the audit. This plan included a timeline that concludes in June of 2015 and costs associated with each implementation piece. In short, the plan included the installation of a new firewall; update to servers and cores switches; expansion at both schools to the IDF and MDF infrastructure; and upgrading the CAT-5 cables to CAT-6 and fiber optic where appropriate.

Though the plan was comprehensive in addressing the infrastructure needs identified in the audit, it certainly does not reflect the only work done by the technology department.

In addition to the infrastructure work, additional laptops and I pads for students have been deployed, teacher laptops have been-for the first time in four years-updated with current software versions and hard drives replaced to increase capacity, computer labs have been reconfigured to allow for better instructional use, on-line schedulers have been created to allow greater efficiency in scheduling laps/laptops/ipads.

**Goal Two:** Provide on going assessment, evaluation, and recommendations relative to the instructional programming of the District.

*Key Areas of Focus:*

- Pilot and transition to a standards based report card (SBR).
- Begin the design and evaluation of the assessments used with the new CCS.

During the 2014 summer months teacher committees refined the SBR for Brook Park and the SBR template was uploaded into the power school system. It was originally planned to pilot the SBR in quarter one with a couple of grade levels for the sole purpose of ensuring that the template was accurately processing the teacher information that was entered. Due to the success we saw with entering the template and the ease at which teachers could enter data, we made a decision to expedite the pilot program and have every grade level use the new SBR in quarter one. This put us one quarter ahead of full implementation.

In order to further communicate our plan to the community; I combined parent presentations on the SBR into Brook Parks open house night. The forums where well attended. An explanation letter designed to help parents understand how to uses the information contained in the SBR was also sent at the reporting period.

The implementation of the SBR has not gone without a few issues. We have seen a couple of technical issues that are easily resolved (i.e. text boxes not being large enough). Some philosophical issues have arisen that need attention such as how to better report information for students who are in a particular grade but may, according to their IEP, be working on standards at a grade level lower. Also, the implementation of the SBR has collided with teachers really working for the first time with assessments on the new common core coupled with the implementation of entirely rebuilt curriculum has some teachers struggling on what to include in assessing a child on a broad standard.

I never expected that the SBR would be a seamless or even easy transition. I do firmly believe it is the correct transition. With that said, the migration to a SBR from the traditional reporting tool has done more to foster discussion about instruction, curriculum, and assessment than any other concept. I have poised the administrative team to guide these discussions to an end that will eventually have teachers actively engaged about student progress, based on their growth over standards, that are aligned with the new curriculum.

SEG is poised to implement *some* form of SBR in the 2015-2016 year with work this year being focused on finalizing the actual template. This work is on schedule with a pilot grade working with the template in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter.

Hand-in-hand with the SBR development is the second key focus of Goal 2, the development of student assessments for the new curriculum and standards. Immediately we encountered significant difficulties in developing our assessments. We quickly realized that teachers were struggling with finding valid resources to use to develop assessments. Further, we became extremely concerned that teachers were pulling assessment material from dozens of areas as we saw this as counter-productive to a long-term goal of common assessments. To combat these issues, we employed the use of a commercially designed program called Mastery Connect. You should recall from the January curriculum presentation the Mastery Connect program and its features. In short, the program allows all the teachers one primary point of access to create assessments using already developed questions that align with particular standards. As this is a web-based resource, it is incredibly easy and not very time consuming to develop assessments.

As mentioned during our curriculum presentation, Mastery Connect has some capacity for our district that goes beyond just developing assessments. This may be a future tool that serves as an actual SBR and may even serve as a parent portal access to a student's growth.

**Goal Three:** Provide on going assessment, evaluation, and recommendations relative to the operations of the district.

*Key Areas of Focus:*

- Evaluate and streamline the process of ERATE eligible accounts.
- Develop recommendations for systems that will allow for actively communicating essential information with D95 community.
- Create facility options to address anticipated increases in future student populations

ERATE funding is an opportunity to capture federal money for specific services based on certain criteria of the District-namely the percent of our free and reduced students. The District receives reimbursement from ERATE for services such as telephone, Internet, content filtering and the like. In any given year, the District may be reimbursed up to 50K for these services. In order to assess the fiscal operations of the district, it was essential to evaluate our entire ERATE process from how we process our applications to how we manage our current accounts to ensure that 1) we were accessing our fullest extent of reimbursement possible and 2) that our management of the agreements eligible for ERATE were being done properly as to avoid having an agreement expire and lose the ERATE funding for that agreement.

A review of ERATE showed that ALL eligible services within the district are currently receiving ERATE funding. This was good as it demonstrates that we have not been losing any potential ERATE funds. However, the review did show that we do not have a good system of knowing the termination dates of our eligible service contracts. This creates a liability for the District, as we could have to renew a service contract outside of the ERATE application process, which, in turn, would make that particular service not eligible for ERATE causing loss of revenue to the District. We have streamlined all eligible contracts through the technology director wherein a timeline has been created that shows when each service needs to go to ERATE application.

The evaluation of ERATE was timely in that the federal government made significant changes to the types of services that would be eligible for ERATE in upcoming years. Essentially they dropped funding for some lower level services, but infused massive amounts of dollars to support Districts in upgrading wireless connectivity in their buildings. To this end, we estimate that we will capture an additional 150K in matching dollars to support our endeavors to improve our wireless access points.

Communication is certainly essential to the operations of any district. A key focus for this year was to find an alternative solution to the previous Expedite system that was traditionally used to alert parents of school closings. A more robust system with enhanced features was desired. To that end, the district implemented Alert Solutions. The implementation was completed in October and is actively used within the District. This program allows for parents to receive voice and email alerts for school emergencies such as closing school or when dismissal of students is held due to an unforeseen incident. The expanded capabilities of the program have allowed principals to communicate important weekly information to parents electronically replacing the unreliable backpack mail.

The demographic study completed in the spring of 2014 produced alarming results. The predicted growth of the district was staggering. The influx of first graders that caused a last minute section and complete shuffling of classrooms was a glimpse as to the seriousness of the issue. Since the early fall of 2014 to present, an enormous amount of time has been spent on the issue of expanding the District's facilities to accommodate the past and future growth of the district. To begin addressing our space issues we developed a short-term solution of using modular classrooms and are on track to have them ready for fall 2015 (this has included meeting with vendors, going through a MWRD approval process, evaluating the site to determine if appropriate electrical/plumbing/sewer is available, meeting with Village officials for zoning purposes; doing site visits of other schools using modular classrooms to understand potential pitfalls).

We also looked at long-term solutions that include adding on to Brook Park, using Madlin Park as a location of a third school building (inclusive of this task alone has been meeting with Village officials, conducting soil testing, property title searches all just to determine if this property is even an option) and significant time was spent on the Broadway property to relocate the District office. We continue to move forward on the

options to our long-term solutions, but the main focus has been getting our modular classroom project complete, as this in of itself is a major undertaking.

In order to keep the community informed of the District's space issues, two community forums were held that resulted in positive feedback. Further, I have updated the community on a monthly basis on the District's progress on both the short and long-term projects through the monthly superintendent's report posted on the District website.

### **Closing Recommendations:**

The work referenced above, for the most part, is completed and/or implemented. However, as we move through the end of the school year, a few items remain as outstanding work:

1. Continue to evaluate the SBR and make changes as appropriate.
2. Continue to evaluate the potential of Mastery Connect as a SBR and/or parent portal.
3. Take the necessary steps to complete the modular classroom project.

## **PART TWO:**

### **Financial Status of the District**

I'm excited to note that the FY15 budget was adopted earlier than ever before through new budget process procedures. In short, we adopted the FY15 budget just 7 days after the start of our fiscal year and had a draft on display prior to the actual July 1 start date. The budget estimated \$12,245,011 in revenues and 13,113,484 in expenditures. Although our expenditures exceed our revenue, this is a result of a conscious decision to spend 775,000 of existing fund balance in the O/M fund to complete the electrical project and another 171,000 to complete the building improvement projects deemed critical by the buildings and grounds committee.

The district's fund balance as of December 30, 2014 was \$8,503,456. The district has expended 52% of its estimated expenditures and received 46% of its estimated revenue. While one may expect that the numbers are exactly 50/50, it is important to note that much expenditure occur on the front end of the FY (i.e. supplies) and do not necessarily indicate a monthly operational expense. Based on a review of financial data, the District is operating within its means and revenues are streaming in as predicted. We have encountered no major surprises. While it is too early yet to forecast ending budget results, I am confident that we are healthy and in a good position today. A further forecast of

ending fund balances, expenditures, and revenues can be done after the second collection (roughly April). A working budget for expenditures will be created by March for review.

### **Instructional Strength of the District:**

The district remains out front on the numerous changes facing educators today and continues to be seen as a leader in how to address these necessary changes.

The Board was presented ISAT and MAP data in the fall of 2014. The ISAT data is difficult to compare to previous years as the test itself had changed significantly due to the common core. Nonetheless, even with the more rigorous standards we significantly out pace the State in the number of students who meet or exceed standards. The MAP data confirms that better than 90 percent of our students in each grade are showing growth in reading and math.

Certainly the new PARCC assessment that will occur this spring has taken the major focus of our curriculum efforts. The preparation to implement this mandatory assessment has taken a significant amount of time and energy. We believe that we have developed schedules that will allow us to deliver the assessment with as little interruption to instructional time as possible. However, as demonstrated to the Board, the PARCC assessment will consume instructional time.

We continue to support the staff in our main initiative of developing assessments for the newly aligned curriculum. The Mastery Connect resource has been well received and we believe will allow for the future growth to common assessments.

### **Status of the physical plant:**

As identified through the goal three, the main focus has been how to address space issues on the short-term with modular classrooms. This coupled with the completion of the major electrical upgrade has been the driving projects.

The buildings and grounds department saw the addition of a maintenance person to address routine maintenance projects. The day-to-day operations have been significantly enhanced as custodians can focus on custodial work and preventive maintenance projects have occurred. A report in the spring of 2015 will further show the impact on the district that the addition of the maintenance person has provided.

### **Closing Remarks:**

The goals outlined for the 2014-2015 year have been or are in process of being completed and represent solid attention to the key areas. Likewise, the financial stability, instructional programming and physical plant are in solid shape.