



WEST VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

1/8/2013

Education Efficiency Audit Response

Over the past several months our membership has been discussing the Education Efficiency Audit and its bearing on education reform efforts in West Virginia. Whether you agree or disagree with the specific findings and recommendations, the document can and should serve as a catalyst for true education reform in the state. For many years, educators and stakeholders at all levels have been struggling with how to significantly improve our education system and to prepare our youth for the future. A variety of initiatives and programs have been introduced and implemented to help move students forward. Some of these efforts have shown success and others have not. While we have made gains, we are not satisfied with our progress. It is clear we can do better.



THE TIME IS NOW

Probably the most significant outcome of the audit process is that it has focused stakeholders on the need for comprehensive school reform in West Virginia.

The Governor, the Legislature, the State Board of Education, the state superintendent, county superintendents, county boards of education, administrators, teachers and service personnel have all read the audit and are showing a willingness to look at our system from top to bottom in order to find a better way to address the needs of our students. Reforming an entire state school system is an enormous undertaking. We need to seize the moment and act now.



WHERE TO BEGIN?

- ✦ Change to the basic structure of our system is needed. The audit calls for **“A More Student-Centered Education System for West Virginia”**. In particular, it states that there is a need to drive more of the decision-making down to the level closest to the students. Research shows that the most effective decisions regarding educating students are made at the classroom and school levels. Teachers need to have the flexibility to teach without the burden of overregulation. In addition, professional development needs to be made available to teachers on pertinent topics to enable them to hone their skills and to keep up with an ever changing world.
 - ✦ Restructuring of the system will allow principals, in conjunction with teachers and staff, to make decisions about the operations of their schools. The principal’s ability to make decisions has been eroded over time with the addition of burdensome policies and code. From staffing to the structure of the school day, the principal’s decision making ability is controlled by extremely prescriptive policy and code to the point that common sense decisions are sometimes stifled.
 - ✦ Oversight of their own districts by county superintendents and school boards is paramount. While it is imperative that the state set broad goals and specific academic targets in order to assure a thorough and efficient system of education, it is also imperative that districts have the flexibility to determine how to accomplish this. The administrators, teachers and staff in each county are well-educated and extremely professional. They have the ability to determine what is best for their districts and their students. They should be entrusted to make the right decisions.
 - ✦ Provision for professional development and other services may best be offered by the eight Regional Educational Service Agencies. Regional Councils, consisting of county superintendents and county school board members, can assess individual district needs and assist the RESA’s in developing appropriate programs to meet those needs. By localizing professional development the state can move away from the “one size fits all” philosophy and move toward a professional development program which is fashioned more to the necessities of individual districts. In addition, RESA’s should continue to assist counties in meeting such needs as the sharing of services and positions, cooperative purchasing etc. The most important role of RESA’s, however, is working with low performing schools. Here too, they are in a unique position to provide district or school specific assistance as the needs arise.
 - ✦ The role of the West Virginia Department of Education will significantly change with proposed restructuring. The State Board of Education has not only indicated its willingness, but more importantly, its ambition to change the way things are done. There is a clear mandate by the Board to “right-size” the Department and move toward a more localized system. The State Superintendent is currently reviewing the roles and resources of the Department with an eye on how to better utilize those resources and where possible, transfer some of them to the individual districts.
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NEXT STEPS

The process of reforming education in West Virginia is a monumental task and will take more than a few months to complete. Every stakeholder needs to be engaged in the process and be focused on the primary purpose of our efforts, which is to provide a world class education system for our children. The future of our state depends on us doing it right. We have just scratched the surface with the proposal on restructuring. There are several other areas that need to be addressed as well. These include, but are not limited to:

- ✚ Insuring Flexibility: Counties require flexibility in making decisions and implementing programs that best suit their situations. Flexibility in such things as personnel hiring, calendar development, structure of the school day, programming, etc. is key to success. The State Board and the Legislature should review policies and codes which present obstacles to local decision making and take appropriate action to remove those obstacles.
- ✚ Recruiting and Retaining the Best Educators. West Virginia is facing a shortage of educators at every level. This is a major issue for the state as we look into the needs of our students in the future. We need to develop a concrete plan to recruit, train and retain the best educators in our state. Not only do we need quality teachers, but we also are facing a shortage of qualified administrators as well.
- ✚ Accountability: A key requirement of reform is insuring accountability. Those entrusted with responsibility must be held accountable for success. Insuring accountability is a process that begins at the individual level with an evaluation system that is meaningful and manageable, and continues with an evaluation system that measures larger organizational structures, i.e. the school or the county.
- ✚ Technology: It is absolutely crucial that the state takes advantage of available technologies which can help bridge the gap in our diverse state. We need to continue to press for statewide access to broadband and to develop the technology infrastructure needed in our schools. We also need to embrace the future of technology.

The WVASA is committed to working with all stakeholders to help create the world class education system we all envision for West Virginia. Success will take dedication, hard work, trust and compromise. We believe that the effort is well worth it. After all, we are talking about our children and our future.

West Virginia Association of School Administrators
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