

A Curriculum Audit™
of the
Coeur d'Alene Public Schools
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

Executive Summary



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May 2019

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Date Audit Presented: May 2019

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III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Curriculum Audit™ is basically an “exception” report. That is, it does not give a summative, overall view of the suitability of a system. Rather, it holds the system up to scrutiny against the predetermined standards of quality, notes relevant findings about the system, and cites discrepancies from audit standards. Recommendations are then provided accordingly to help the district improve its quality in the areas of noted deficiency.

Coeur d’Alene Public Schools (CdA Schools) is situated along Lake Coeur d’Alene and extends across much of Kootenai County in North Idaho. The district serves nearly 11,000 students in 17 schools: 11 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 2 traditional high schools, and an alternative high school and dropout retrieval program. They offer full-time kindergarten at four schools, a special needs preschool program, and student opportunities at a joint professional-technical high school campus, Kootenai Technical Educational Campus (KTEC), shared with neighboring school districts. District enrollment has steadily grown by 2.6% over the past five years.

In July 2018, the board of Coeur d’Alene Public Schools appointed Dr. Steven Cook as the new superintendent. Shortly thereafter, he and his staff requested a contract with Curriculum Management Solutions, inc. to conduct a Curriculum Management Audit of the district as a part of their assessment of the current conditions and their continuous improvement process. The district leadership team desired a clear analysis of where the district is in terms of teaching and learning and requested guidance on areas for improvement to better meet the needs of the students and families of CdA Schools.

The audit looks at a district through the lens of five standards:

- Standard One: Control and Governance
- Standard Two: Direction and Curriculum
- Standard Three: Equality, Equity and Consistency
- Standard Four: Feedback and Assessment
- Standard Five: Productivity and Resource Use

In the audit process, auditors ask the following four questions about each of the standards:

- Is it there?
- Is it any good? (quality)
- Is it used?
- Does it make a difference? (impact on students)

Five auditors made the on-site visit to Coeur d’Alene Public Schools on February 4-7, 2019. One additional team member served as an off-site auditor. The auditors reviewed and analyzed over 134 different types of documents, many with multiple pages and editions, in addition to board policies and job descriptions prior to, during, and after the on-site visit. They also reviewed 1,900 samples of student work submitted by teachers during January and February 2019. While on-site, auditors visited 284 classrooms and held 208 interviews and/or focus groups (Representative comments from student focus groups can be found in [Appendix P.](#)) with stakeholders, including board members, the superintendent and district office administrators, principals and other campus administrators, teacher, parents, students, and community representatives. They also administered teacher, campus leader, and parent online surveys prior to the site visit for which they received 420, 29, and 1,933 responses, respectively.

The auditors triangulated information from the document review, interviews, classroom visits, and surveys to arrive at 17 findings and 9 recommendations based on the 5 audit standards as cross-referenced in [Exhibit S.0.1.](#) The generic findings are listed in the exhibit under each standard, providing the Coeur d’Alene Public Schools with specific details about the current and potential barriers and challenges that internal stakeholders face in their efforts to move the district toward achieving its mission and goals enroute to the next level of excellence.

In the far-left column are the recommendation numbers that represent the findings. Recommendations can be found at the end of the full report and provide explicit steps for removing those barriers noted in the findings.

Exhibit S.0.1

Finding and Recommendations Aligned to Audit Standards

Coeur d'Alene Public Schools

February 2019

Recommendations	Standard 1: Control			Standard 2: Direction			Standard 3: Consistency				Standard 4: Feedback			Standard 5: Productivity			
	Finding 1.1: Policy	Finding 1.2: Jobs/TO	Finding 1.3: Planning	Finding 2.1: Curr Planning	Finding 2.2: Curr Scope	Finding 2.3: Curr Quality	Finding 3.1: Prof Develop	Finding 3.2: Instruc/Monitor	Finding 3.3: Artifacts	Finding 3.4: Equity	Finding 4.1: Assess/Eval	Finding 4.2: Assess Scope	Finding 4.3: Data Trends	Finding 5.1: Budget	Finding 5.2: Technology	Finding 5.3: Facilities	Finding 5.4: Interventions
1										X							
2											X	X	X				
3				X	X	X											X
4							X	X	X						X		
5			X	X			X				X				X		X
6	X																
7		X															
8														X			
9																X	

As noted in Exhibit S.0.1 each of the recommendations covers one or more findings; an “X” indicates the major recommendation assigned to each finding.

Standard One: Control

When reviewing the current status of Coeur d'Alene Public Schools in relationship to the principles of Standard One which addresses system control and oversight, the auditors found the Coeur d'Alene Public Schools' board policies and administrative procedures did not meet audit criteria in both content and specificity to guide all necessary aspects of curriculum management and the educational program. Several policies in the curriculum management areas of control, direction, consistency and equity, feedback, and productivity (the five standards of the audit) were either weak or absent (see Finding 1.1).

The auditors found board policies that require the development of job descriptions but not the required content and regular revision of those job descriptions. Most job descriptions do not reflect important curricular linkages to connect the position to the core business of the school district—design, development, and delivery of curriculum that promotes high levels of achievement for all students. Auditors concluded that delineation and communication of employee roles, relationships, and responsibilities are not clear enough to support sustained quality management in Coeur d'Alene Public Schools. They also found the current organization chart does not reflect sound organizational management of the school system when evaluated against audit criteria. Roles depicted in job descriptions vs the organizational chart are sometimes confusing; random responsibilities and words on the organizational chart are not included in job descriptions (see Finding 1.2).

Recent planning in Coeur d'Alene Public Schools does not meet audit criteria to produce a viable planned approach to curriculum and program design capable of supporting strategic actions to close existing gaps in student achievement and assure a quality education for all students. Quality plans have not historically been in place for the district, schools, departments, curriculum management, student assessment, program evaluation, professional development, performance-based budgeting, facilities, or technology. Most planning documents that were provided were missing important aspects (see [Finding 1.3](#)). It must be noted that the new superintendent and board spoke of developing a long-term strategic plan using the results of this curriculum management audit, the Futures report for special education, and the graduate profile work that has begun. There is a strong intent to move forward in this area.

Standard Two: Direction

Under the parameters of [Standard Two](#), the auditors examined the district's direction for teaching and learning. Specifically, they looked for systematic curriculum management planning, representation of curriculum offerings in high quality written curriculum guides, and clear alignment of the written, taught, and tested curriculum.

In order to effectively manage the design and delivery of curriculum in complex school systems, adequate staffing and resources are devoted to the most crucial role of the school system's mission: defining, developing, implementing, monitoring, evaluating, and revising the written, taught, and assessed curricula. In carrying out these critical tasks, certain balances must be maintained among those tasks best kept at the district office and those best left to the discretion of individual schools. This balance is critical in not only assuring both consistency and quality in student learning, but also in supporting autonomy and flexibility at school sites to ensure that they can meet the unique needs of their students. The audit expectations regarding those functions of curriculum management that are to be tightly held and those that may be loosely held are presented in [Exhibit 2.1.1](#).

When functions that should be loosely held are instead held tightly, such as use of curriculum resources or instructional strategies, teachers and school leaders lack the flexibility and autonomy to make decisions in response to demonstrated student needs. Likewise, when curriculum objectives and assessments are not held tightly, there is no consistency in what students are learning or in the evaluation of that learning. This can result in students being inadequately prepared for external, high stakes assessments and the next steps in their educational and life journey.

The auditors found that Coeur d'Alene Public Schools needs a comprehensive plan to provide direction and the expected processes for the design and delivery of the curriculum (see [Finding 2.1](#)).

When looking at the scope of curriculum available to teachers in the system, auditors found the scope of the written curriculum in elementary schools for core and non-core and high school non-core are considered adequate, while middle school core and non-core and high school core are inadequate to direct instruction in the classroom (see [Finding 2.2](#)).

In analyzing the quality of curriculum documents in the Coeur d'Alene Public Schools, auditors found a lack of quality and specificity of minimal basic components needed to promote a highly focused, consistent educational program with an aligned written, taught, and tested curriculum. Further, the audit found that congruency between instructional resources and Idaho Content Standards or Common Core State Standards in English/Language Arts in two dimensions, content and cognitive type, did not meet the content specificity and cognitive rigor that Coeur d'Alene Public Schools is committed to as expressed through various planning documents in the district. In mathematics, the audit found that mathematic assessments given at a specific time during a unit of learning are misaligned in cognitive type, minimalizing their ability to support student learning and success on state and local assessments (see [Finding 2.3](#)).

Standard Three: Equality, Equity, and Consistency

In [Standard Three](#), the audit team found inconsistencies in several areas of district and school operations and educational services. Coeur d'Alene Public Schools professional development, although plentiful, was not guided by a clear vision and purpose, and current planning for professional development does not meet audit standards for coordinating initiatives across the district departments and school sites (see [Finding 3.1](#)).

In classrooms, auditors found instructional practices to be primarily large group, teacher-centered, at low cognitive levels, with few effective instructional strategies in use. The auditors found that instructional strategies vary from classroom to classroom and are not consistent with research-based practices that support teaching and learning for all. Additionally, auditors found that instructional monitoring lacks focus and consistency to ensure that all students in all classrooms have the greatest opportunities for student success (see [Finding 3.2](#)).

When analyzing 1,900 student work samples/artifacts provided to the audit team, the cognitive demands and contexts of the work were most frequently low and of the least engaging type in all content areas and grade levels, except high school English language arts (ELA). Almost half the elementary science and social studies artifacts either partially met or did not meet the expectations of the identified standard. Many artifacts at the elementary and middle school level were below the reported grade level. Disparities exist between schools located in the north vs. the south parts of the district in social studies and science (see [Finding 3.3](#)).

As a result of inequitable policies and practices, auditors found that the Coeur d'Alene Public Schools issues related to access to resources varying graduation requirements, transfer students, and access to full day kindergarten. Varying graduation requirements limit access to potential future career courses in the area of elective choices for students who attend Coeur d'Alene and Venture High Schools. The system's transfer policy is forcing some economically disadvantaged students to transfer to schools outside their neighborhood school. While the district is providing equity by offering full-day kindergarten to students enrolled in southern elementary schools with higher economically disadvantaged student populations, the system is unintentionally neglecting other economically disadvantaged students in its northern elementary schools (see [Finding 3.4](#)).

Standard Four: Feedback

The focus of [Standard Four](#) is on feedback of various types and how the system uses those data. Typically, the information for feedback might come from student assessments, program evaluations, surveys, or follow-up studies with former students. The auditors found Coeur d'Alene Public Schools needs a formal planned approach to comprehensive student assessment and program planning and evaluation (see [Finding 4.1](#)).

The scope of formal student assessment in the Coeur d'Alene Public Schools does not meet audit criteria when viewed across all grade levels and curriculum offerings. Only 36% of the curriculum offerings in the district are formally assessed. The core content (English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) in grades 6-8 was found to be adequate; however, elementary core and non-core, middle school non-core, and high school core and non-core did not meet audit standards. Adequate assessment tools were not provided to the auditors, indicating that sufficient data for instructional decision making in all areas of the curriculum and at all grade levels are not available for teaching and learning (see [Finding 4.2](#)).

The auditors found that the district's student achievement rates on the *ISAT* have been consistently above the state average for the last three years. However, they also found achievement gaps between various subgroups of students within the district; without successful intervention measures, it will take years to close some gaps, while others may never close without concentrated efforts by the Coeur d'Alene Public Schools. They further found that student achievement in the district is flat. Very little change, either positive or negative, was noted in the three years of student achievement data analyzed (see [Finding 4.3](#)).

Without critical data feedback, programs that are ineffective are often allowed to continue without modification or strategic abandonment. Ineffective programs continue to use resources that could be utilized more effectively to meet student learning needs. Such purposeful approaches to program evaluation reduce the chance that unnecessary and ineffective programs will be adopted in a rush to "do something." How a district uses data in making important decisions can significantly affect the quality and outcomes of those decisions.

Standard Five: Productivity

In [Standard Five](#), the focus is on productivity within the district. The areas of productivity that auditors examined in CdA schools included budget, interventions, facilities, and instructional technology. In reviewing the district's budgetary processes, auditors found a traditional formula-based process in place with no evidence of efforts to tightly connect student achievement or program performance feedback to budgetary decisions.

Budgetary programs are funded based on campus decisions with no connectivity to the district's curricular goals or strategic priorities, and without cost benefit (see [Finding 5.1](#)).

Coeur d'Alene Public Schools has made significant investments in technology. However, a comprehensive technology plan is needed that clearly identifies the intended use of instructional technology. Professional development can support teachers learning to raise the level use of technology by teachers and students observed across the district (see [Finding 5.2](#)).

Regarding district facilities, auditors concluded that the Coeur d'Alene Public Schools has adequate and well-maintained facilities to support the teaching and learning environment. Multi-year facility planning has started, but a comprehensive plan is needed to adequately replace or recondition aging facilities and handle growth patterns throughout the district. Classroom capacity across the district is at a maximum to meet enrollment needs, and the district's current plans for new facility construction should be continued (see [Finding 5.3](#)).

Effective program interventions contribute to school improvement and productivity. An intervention that sustains a positive impact is connected to district priorities and is well planned, adequately funded, and fully implemented. Coeur d'Alene Public Schools has a plethora of programs, initiatives, and strategies being used throughout the district. A majority of these programs are focused on supporting other areas of student needs outside the core content areas of learning. Auditors found a loosely coupled system regarding the selection, implementation, and evaluation of these programs and interventions. Currently, no district-wide processes are in place that require interventions or establish an expectation of a systemic planned approach to the selection, implementation, and evaluation of interventions for effectiveness (see [Finding 5.4](#)).

In summary, Coeur d'Alene Public Schools and its stakeholders are faced with both challenges and opportunities. The district has a new superintendent who with his cabinet communicates a new expectation of excellence in teaching and learning and instills a sense of commitment in converting this vision into reality. Teachers, administrators, staff, and the board of trustees have indicated a desire to support the new superintendent as he leads the district to the next level of excellence and they collectively set the standards for high quality educational opportunities for all students. Undertaking the Curriculum Audit is evidence of such commitment, and the auditors are confident that the audit report responds to the superintendent's vision for an evaluation of the structure, organization, and effectiveness of the district's curriculum management system. However, future progress will depend, in part, on the district leadership's efforts to address the issues presented in the audit, including the willingness of the board to allocate additional resources necessary to implement the recommendations.

In 2002, the Coeur d'Alene board contracted with CMSi to perform a similar audit as this one being completed in May of 2019. As a matter of significant interest, most of the findings and the recommendations made in that original audit are present in the audit completed today. Perhaps some of these findings today would not have existed if those identified challenges from 2002 were ameliorated years ago when the issues were first identified? The auditors' guidance for the current board and leadership would be to face these challenging issues head-on and commit to resolving these for the benefit of all current and future learners in the Coeur d'Alene Public Schools.

It is important to note that the leadership, staff, and community of Coeur d'Alene Public Schools has shown great capacity for reacting and being proactive to critical needs in the past year. The community experienced devastating loss in the spring of 2018 with four suicides, resulting in great concern for the mental health of students and staff. As a result of this, professional development for the current year, under the direction of the new superintendent and his team, has provided a strong focus on mental health and suicide prevention K-12. As a high school student noted in an interview, this community "had our backs" and that student and his peers also spoke of the feeling of love and support during a difficult time. CdA Schools has demonstrated the capacity to take care of business when put in the highest stress a community can feel.

The CMSi audit team has suggested numerous steps for improving all areas in which the current status precluded meeting audit criteria. While additional actions might be developed by the district administration and staff to implement those recommended changes, the recommendations that have been offered have a history of success in school districts. The first step is for the superintendent to develop a work plan for responding to the findings

and recommendations. With eventual approval by the board of trustees and active implementation by the administration over the next three to five years, this blueprint can bring organizational effectiveness and student achievement to new heights.