

## MORRIS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT #417

The Morris County School District is one of several school districts volunteering to participate in the school efficiency review process. We thank them for their willingness to be involved with this project.

The review of Morris County's school district was initiated in September 2010 and concluded in February 2011. This report will identify best practices of the Morris County School District and provide suggestions on ways to further improve the district's operation efficiencies.

### School district profile information:

- The Morris County School District is located in Morris County in East Central Kansas. Morris County is one of two school districts located in the county.
- The 2009 U.S. Census data reports Morris County had an estimated population of 5,994. In 2000, the census reported an estimated 6,104 resided in the county. This is a 1.8% decline in the county's population.
- The racial makeup of the school district is over 88% Caucasian; this figure has been relatively steady over the years. This compares to a 87% average in the region schools, a 86% average among peer schools, and a statewide average of 69%.
- The school district consists of 537 square miles compared to the state average of 279 square miles per school district.
- Morris County School District currently employs 121 employees, including 80 certified teaching and administrative staff.
- The 2010-2011 budgeted general fund and supplemental general fund was \$7,453,621.
- In 2009-2010 the average teacher's salary was \$49,590. This compares to an average of \$46,191 in region schools, \$48,072 among peer schools, and a statewide average of \$48,671.
- In 2009-2010 the average administrator's salary was \$69,641. This compares to an average of \$71,855 in region schools, \$74,711 among peer schools, and a statewide average of \$83,911.
- In 2009-2010, the 20-year salary trend for teachers was ranked 113th in the state. The region average was 186th, and the peer average was 157th.
- In 2009-2010 the pupil-teacher ratio was 11.0:1. This compares to an average of 12.5:1 in region schools, 13.7:1 among peer schools, and a statewide average of 13.1:1.

## COMPARISONS TO PEER AND REGION SCHOOLS

CISL has established peer and region schools to support comparability of selected criteria. There were four peer schools selected and 18 region schools to which Morris County was compared. The peer schools were selected based on similar size, similar socio-economical status, and performance based on state test results. The region schools were selected based on school districts that are in contiguous counties which include Chase, Dickinson, Geary, Lyon, Marion, and Wabaunsee counties. The peer districts selected include Rock Creek #323, Riley County, #378, Hiawatha #415, and Hesston #460. Comparisons between Morris County and these peer schools are explored in further detail in the complete report; the full report also includes all school survey results, and the full findings by the Morris County review team.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM REPORTS

Team members were selected to evaluate the school district in the areas of leadership, teaching and learning, facilities management, and human resources. Each team member submitted reports with findings, commendations, recommendations / opportunities for improvement, and impacts. An extended report will be submitted in the future with the full findings. Included here are highlights from the commendations, recommendations / opportunities for improvement, and projected impacts.

### Commendations:

#### Facilities Management

1. Custodial and maintenance staff is dedicated and strive to meet the needs of the district.
2. The recent establishment of individual department budgets for maintenance and food service provides for oversight and better control of available budgets and expenditures by the individual managers.
3. The food service areas are orderly and well maintained. Food service staff is friendly and competent.

#### Human Resources

1. The recruitment process for licensed and classified staff is centered through the district office. Posting of positions and final hiring procedures insure district administration is aware of staffing decisions and assures that required paperwork and payroll information is obtained.
2. Parents expressed satisfaction and pride in the overall quality of professional staff.
3. Orientation for licensed staff is thorough and systematic.

4. The district provides single health coverage for qualifying employees.

### **Leadership**

1. The board of education regularly invites students to present information about their accomplishments at the board meetings.
2. The superintendent is guiding the Envision 417 committee to initiate a fact finding/diagnostic phase of their work.
3. Parents have a high level of participation at Site Council meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and PTO meetings.

### **Teaching & Learning**

1. Communication pertaining to curriculum, instruction, and assessments is regularly presented to the Board of Education.
2. Each building has a Building Leadership Team.
3. Dual credit courses are available at the high school.
4. Credit recovery is available at the high school.
5. Each building has a staff member designated as a technology assistant.

## **Opportunities for Improvement / Recommendations:**

### **Facilities Management**

1. It is recommended the district emphasize competitive solicitation of products, supplies and services at all levels in maintenance, custodial operations, and food service and transportation operations. Interviews indicate, in general, competitive pricing is solicited when reasonably available. In some instances, competitive solicitations may be limited based on Council Grove's location and available commercial resources. Despite such limitations, it is suggested purchasing policies and procedures be reviewed by the Superintendent with all operations entities (Maintenance Director, Food Service Director, Transportation) to maximize competitive solicitation and cost efficiency.

**Impact:** This would result in cost savings. A 5% overall reduction in product, supply and service purchases costs for maintenance, food service, and transportation operations would net approximately \$34,000 in savings (based on FY 2011 budgets). More data appears in the full report.

2. It is recommended the district continue to consider options to reduce operational costs through facility consolidation. The district's Vision Committee represents a viable cross section of district representatives that can identify options; with considerations for attendance center location, transportation needs, and possible staff reductions. Based on a limited review of age and condition, the Prairie Heights Elementary School building in Dwight may represent the most likely candidate for closure.  
**Impact:** This would result in overall cost savings for utilities, maintenance, and repair. The possible staff reduction associated with building consolidation would further enhance overall operational cost reductions.
3. It is recommended the district develop and maintain an inventory of major maintenance and custodial equipment items. This list should include such items as tractors, mowers, snow removal equipment, floor scrubbers, backpack and/or upright vacuums, etc. The inventory listing may include age, hours, location, capacity, voltage, general condition, estimated replacement cost, etc.  
**Impact:** This would provide valuable information in identifying and prioritizing future planned equipment repair and/or Capital expenditure replacement.
4. It is recommended the district review custodial assignments and ensure personnel are maintaining their assigned 40 hour work week. Interviews indicate many of the custodians are working more than their normally assigned 40 hours/week without overtime compensation or compensatory time off. The custodians are aware they may routinely exceed their assigned hours.  
**Impact:** This would relieve the district of possible claims for additional unpaid compensation and keep the district in compliance with Fair Labor Standards Act requirements.
5. It is recommended the district review the food service program to determine what cost saving measures and/or revenue enhancements may be available. The Superintendent indicated that up to \$120,000 has been supplemented in recent years to support the food service program. Opportunities for budget reduction/enhancement may include:
  - increased and/or expanded competitive solicitation for food product and services (solicit food prices more frequently than once per year)
  - strategic changes in menus to reduce cost and/or enhance participation
  - re-evaluation of meal pricing to generate additional revenue.**Impact:** This would bring the program closer to self-supporting status and reduce the need to supplement funding from other sources.

## Human Resources

1. It is recommended the district review and revises the classified staff handbook. It appears a new section begins on page seven as items on the first six pages are numbered and items beginning on

page seven are in alphabetical order. There is no information regarding overtime, compensatory time, etc. in the handbook.

**Impact:** This would make necessary information related to employment easily located. While policies and procedures are contained in the policy handbook, most employees would not take the time to wade through a lengthy document to find the information pertinent to their position. Licensed employees are able to find most information relevant to their employment in the negotiated agreement.

2. It is recommended the district compensate overtime hours in accordance with the law.

**Impact:** This would allow classified staff overtime compensation in accordance to the law. Numerous classified staff reported working in excess of 40 hours a week. While they expressed an understanding that they could take compensatory time, they felt unable to do so due to job demands. Policies for working and being compensated for overtime should be adhered to and published in the classified handbook.

3. It is recommended the district negotiate a cap on premium payments or consider changes in the deductible amount or some combination of both. The fringe benefit of a single health insurance plan, while attractive for recruitment and retention, can be problematic in terms of controlling costs of increasing premiums.

**Impact:** This would save \$180,000 annually if the deductible amounts were changed to \$1,000 single/\$3,000 family. While a single health insurance benefit to all qualifying employees is an attractive component for recruitment and retention, the lack of limitation in the language of the agreement/guidelines opens the district to uncontrolled increases in premiums. The current monthly premium for the A plan is \$534 per month or approximately \$6,400 per year. Health insurance coverage is also provided, on a limited basis, to retirees. The current annual deductibles for the health insurance plan are \$200 single/\$400 family.

4. It is recommended the district review the professional staff to student ratio.

**Impact:** This would reduce licensed positions by 5.3. At an average teacher salary of \$49,590 the annual savings would be approximately \$262,827. More data appears in the full report.

5. It is recommended the district review job descriptions for all classified positions and share them with staff on a regular basis.

**Impact:** This would promote improved communication and convey to classified staff that their roles are as important to the mission of the district as licensed staff. The job descriptions appear to be dated. Some classified staff reported either not receiving job descriptions, or the nature of their assignment having changed and the job description was no longer accurate. A good method for maintaining accurate job descriptions is to require an automatic review prior to posting an open position. This ensures descriptions are revised as needed.

## Leadership

1. It is recommended the district develop a more comprehensive long range plan for the next 3-5 years which includes long range planning for facilities. It is recommended an outside facilitator be used to assist the board in the development of this plan.  
**Impact:** This would guide the board and district to use limited resources to produce the most efficient and effective learning environment for students. Inclusion of patrons and parents in the development of this long range plan would play a big role in reducing the divisiveness within the district. Parents, patrons and staff from all schools within the district should be invited in to the development of a collaborative strategic plan to guide the district in the next 3-5 years. A collaborative process would increase the trust and cohesiveness among the parents, board members and staff.
2. It is recommended the district explore the amount of time principals are out of their buildings for training and committee meetings. Examine the impact of the “out of building” activities on the performance of their schools.  
**Impact:** This would improve student performance by increasing the amount of time the principals spend with teachers and students and increase the time teachers and students have access to the principal.
3. It is recommended the superintendent communicate directly with the staff on the content and process of the Envision 417 committee and these meetings be conducted on a regular basis during a time most teachers would be able to attend. One suggestion might be weekly morning coffees the teachers could attend prior to the start of the school day.  
**Impact:** This would reduce the anxiety of the staff and improve overall morale.

## Teaching & Learning

1. It is recommended the district review class size at the elementary and middle school levels.  
**Impact:** Class size below 20 stretches the resources available to all students.
2. It is recommended the district utilize KSDE structuring for Math improvement, since the district did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in Math in the spring of 2010.  
**Impact:** This would assist the district with making AYP in the future. Utilizing a Math diagnostic assessment and a progress monitoring assessment would assist with instructional decision making related to student support and interventions.
3. It is recommended the district revise the use of Professional Learning Communities (PLC). The district is preparing for more efficient usage of PLCs.  
**Impact:** This would enhance communication, data analysis, and decision making related to instruction. Regular scheduled PLC time, structured meeting format, and accountability of attendance and shared minutes of each PLC would contribute to efficiency.
4. It is recommended the district establish an annual training schedule for paraprofessionals.

**Impact:** This would maximize progress for at-risk students. Since paraprofessionals are responsible for student support and learning, it is important they receive professional development related to content, pedagogy, school improvement, and district initiatives. The training can occur during scheduled professional development days or during student contact days.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY SCHOOL REVIEW SURVEY RESULTS

### ADMINISTRATORS AND BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS SURVEY RESULTS

Of the 13 possible administrators and board of education members in the Morris County School district, 12 completed the survey. Board of education members and administrators were asked to respond to 52 statements; the items below were the ones receiving the strongest responses.

#### Commendations from Administrators and Board of Education Members:

- All of the administrators and board of education members responding said teachers in our schools care about students' needs.
- 92% of the administrators and board of education members responding felt the district has effective special program for students at risk of dropping out of school.
- All of the administrators and board of education members responding thought staff development opportunities are provided by the district for school administrators.
- All of the administrators and board of education members responding said the schools are clean.

#### Opportunities for Improvement / Recommendations from Administrators and Board of Education Members:

- 62% of the administrators and board of education members responding said the district does not have an effective employee recruitment program.
- Nearly 70% of the administrators and board of education members responding thought teachers are not rewarded for superior performance.
- Over 60% of the administrators and board of education members responding felt the district does not award the competence and experience of administrators.

- All of the administrators and board of education members responding said drugs and alcohol are a problem in this district.

## **CLASSIFIED STAFF SURVEY RESULTS**

Of the 40 possible classified staff in the Morris County School District, 18 completed the survey. Staff members were asked to respond to 45 statements; the items below were the ones receiving the strongest responses.

### **Commendations from Classified Staff:**

- Nearly 85% of the classified staff responding said the board of education members have a good knowledge of the educational needs of students.
- All of the classified staff responding thought building administrators in our school care about students' needs.
- Nearly 95% of the classified staff responding thought teachers in our schools care about students' needs.
- 77% of the classified staff responding said the schools are clean.

### **Opportunities for Improvement / Recommendations from Classified Staff:**

- 56% of the classified staff responding believes the morale of the central office is not good.
- 55% of the classified staff responding thought the district does not reward the competence and experience of classified staff.
- Nearly 75% of the classified staff responding said employees who perform below the standard of expectation are not counseled appropriately and timely.
- 94% of the classified staff responding felt drugs and alcohol are a problem in this district.

## **PARENTS' SURVEY RESULTS**

Of all the parents/patrons in the Morris County School District, 163 completed the survey. Parents/Patrons were asked to respond to 38 statement; the items below were the ones receiving the strongest responses.

### **Commendations from Parents:**



- 75% of the parents/patrons responding believe building administrators in our school care about students' needs.
- Over 80% of the parents/patrons responding said teachers in our school care about students' needs.
- 76% of the parents/patrons responding thought students feel safe and secure at school.
- 88% of the parents/patrons responding felt schools are clean.

### **Opportunities for Improvement / Recommendations from Parents:**

- Nearly 50% of the parents/patrons responding said the district does not have effective special programs for advanced placement.
- 39% of the parents/patrons responding thought the district does not have effective counseling programs for students.
- Nearly 80% of the parents/patrons responding believe drugs and alcohol are a problem in this district.
- Nearly 50% of the parents/patrons responding felt vandalism is a problem in this district.

## **STUDENTS' SURVEY RESULTS**

Of the 232 possible students in the Morris County School district, 86 completed the survey. Students were asked to respond to 33 statements; the items below were the ones receiving the strongest responses.

### **Commendations from Students:**

- Over 75% of the students' responding said teachers in our school care about students' needs.
- Nearly 75% of the students' responding thought the district has effective special program for dual-credit/college equivalency courses.
- 72% of the students' responding felt safe and secure at school.
- 77% of the students' responding said cafeteria facilities are sanitary and neat.

### **Opportunities for Improvement / Recommendations from Students:**

- 36% of the students' responding said the district does not have effective educational programs for vocational (career and technology) education.

- Nearly 40% of the students' responding thought the district does not have effective counseling programs for students.
- Nearly 60% of the students' responding felt drugs and alcohol are a problem in this district.
- 43% of the students' responding said vandalism is a problem in this district.

## **TEACHERS' SURVEY RESULTS**

Of the 74 possible teachers in the Morris County School district, 58 completed the survey. Teachers were asked to respond to 44 statements; the items below were the ones receiving the strongest responses.

### **Commendations from Teachers:**

- Nearly 70% of the teachers responding said the board of education members listen to the opinions and desires of others.
- 92% of the teachers responding thought building administrators in our school care about students' needs.
- 75% of the teachers responding believe the district's health insurance package meets their needs.
- Nearly 85% of the teachers responding felt schools are clean.

### **Opportunities for Improvement / Recommendations from Teachers:**

- 74% of the teachers responding thought the district does not have effective special programs for advanced placement.
- Nearly 60% of the teachers responding said the district does not have effective counseling programs for students.
- 70% of the teachers responding felt employees who perform below the standard of expectations are not counseled appropriately and timely.
- 80% of the teachers responding believe teachers are not rewarded for superior performance and experience.
- Nearly 90% of the teachers responding said drugs and alcohol are a problem in this district.