Engage Site Councils to improve your system

Site councils were once a vital ingredient in the collaborative effort to promote school improvement in Kansas. The 1992 School District Finance and Quality Performance Act required each school have a site council. The Act gave the council the following responsibility: “. . . providing advice and counsel in evaluating state, school district, and school site performance goals and objectives and in determining the methods that should be employed at the school site to meet these goals and objectives.”

In March 2002, the Kansas State Board of Education approved a set of guidelines that broadened the scope of site council activities.

In the current educational climate - given the many fiscal challenges districts face and the latest changes in student achievement accountability measures due to the recent ESEA waiver – districts have both the need and an opportunity to make site councils an integral part of improving schools.

Regardless of reform efforts, the principles of quality public schools remain the same: rigorous aligned curriculum, monitoring and assessing school performance for improvement, community engagement, quality leadership, and effective educators.

McREL has validated this point in their research; What Works in Schools (2003), indicating school level parent and community involvement is a critical factor in highly effective schools. McREL describes three action steps that align with the work of Site Councils: 1) Establish vehicles for communication between schools, parents and the community, 2) Establish multiple ways for parents and community to be involved in the day-to-day running of the school, 3) Establish governance vehicles that allow for the involvement of parents and community members.

Site councils can serve as the mechanism for engaging and informing your community about ways to support your local schools as they strive for ever higher standards. According to the 2012 PDK/Gallup poll 76, percent of respondents indicated they know a school teacher very well. This is significant because you and your teachers have the necessary connections to engage the community around your schools.

J.K. Campbell, superintendent of Winfield USD 465, contacted the Kansas Association of School Boards to re-engage the site councils within his community schools. His intention was to reestablish site councils as a vital part of the continuous improvement work occurring in Winfield schools. Winfield had recently completed a strategic plan outlining district priorities, making this the perfect time to give site councils a renewed sense of purpose. The site councils could now focus on monitoring site performance, assessing building needs, setting priorities related to the strategic plans, identifying issues and barriers to improvement, and advocating for local schools to the larger Winfield community.

In partnership with KASB, Winfield principals and district administrators worked together to redefine the make-up, role and purpose of site councils. This gave building and district leaders the opportunity to set clear expectations about the work site councils should be doing, and how site councils should function.

Discussions during this training focused on getting the right people on site councils, strategies for increasing participation on site councils, a structure for reporting the work of site councils to the board of education, and utilizing the council members as key communicators in the community. Also discussed during the initial training were topics that should be covered to inform site councils about changes in education policy/issues at the state and federal level, as well as strategic plan priorities.

Dr. Campbell also used this opportunity to tie in leadership concepts and ideas previously discussed during recent McREL Balanced Leadership training to give principals a framework to assist in developing stronger site councils.

The second part of the training was conducted with all current site council members in the Winfield school district. During this training KASB staff facilitated discussions about the shift in focus of the site councils. This provided building leaders with an opportunity to listen to their current site council members’ reactions to the shift in focus, and share ideas developed in the previously described administrator training. Site Council members then began to formulate items that they felt were pertinent to improving their schools within the framework of the Winfield strategic plan, and looming changes to the educational system at the state and federal level.

“The school is the significant unit for improvement and those associated with the individual school are the persons to effect change.”

John Goodlad, A Place Called School

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FROM THE KASB EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DR. JOHN HEIM

I’m in love with my car (apologies to Freddy Mercury)...

If any and all of my positive attributes can be attributed to my mother, does it naturally follow that all of my bad habits can be linked directly to Heim genes? I will leave that debate up to the geneticist, and to my mom and dad. Suffice it to say I inherited my unhealthy love of vehicles from my father. My recollection is we had a new car at least every two years when we were growing up, whether we needed one or not. Max and I are always in search of the best car.

I used to drive a 4x4 pickup. It was perfect for me - I enjoy motorcycles and bikes, home and yard projects, and the like. My truck was great for hauling all manner of things, and its crew cab meant I could bring the kids along. But circumstances changed and a 120-mile commute became a part of my daily life. Fourteen mpg at over $3 per gallon got painful fast. I had something that was very efficient, but not very efficient. As Max would say, ‘time to trade.’

My son inherited the truck, and I bought a compact diesel-powered automobile: 45 mpg took my gas consumption from 8.5 gallons a day to 2.6 a day. Just like in the commercials, I was flying by the gas stations. Then came the Kansas winter. My little car did not like the snow. I got stuck in my own driveway. I needed something that could handle the weather.

Furthermore, after a year of 500-mile weeks, that poor little car’s tiny little seat started to rebel against my 220 pound self, which brought about an equal and opposite reaction in my lower back. Something had to give. I was very efficient, but not very effective. As Max would say, ‘time to trade.’

So now I drive an all wheel drive mid-sized sedan that gets about 25 mpg. The comfortable seats support my ample frame quite well, and I haven’t been stuck yet. I still can’t haul my bikes, but I can borrow my son’s truck in a pinch. It’s not the most efficient. It’s not the most effective. It is the most efficacious.

I shared this story with Mark Tallman, and he stared at me blankly. Maybe some of you are, too. As my kids would say, “Cool story bro, did you find five dollars?”

Here’s why it matters. This past year, Legislative Post Audit (LPA) was tasked by the Legislature to do efficiency audits on a select number of schools. They set about their task with their usual vigor, and in my experience with LPA, I have always found them to be fair and thorough. Their task was to find areas in which schools could be more efficient.

Had I given LPA the task of finding the most efficient car for my commute, I would be driving a two-seat electric vehicle of some kind, spending a couple of dollars a day on my commute. It is the most efficient vehicle available. Of course, I would have to stop half-way and charge for several hours before finishing my commute, I could never take my car farther than 30-40 miles without an outlet or a very long extension cord, and my commute would go from two hours a day to about 10 hours a day including charging time. Efficient, but not very effective.

The question that needs to be asked is this: “What is the most efficacious way to meet the constitutional requirement for an improving educational system for all students?” We can drive a small electric vehicle, but not without leaving a lot of students behind. We probably can’t afford a Porsche Cayenne Turbo.

Many of you are familiar with Mark Tallman’s Index of Educational Achievement, a composite list of measures that show Kansas public schools rank seventh in the nation on multiple measures of student achievement. These measures show Kansas is very effective.

What you may not know is the same data sources show Kansas spends less per pupil than any other state ranked in the top seven. More importantly, when one factors in student demographics as defined by the number of low-income students, Kansas schools deliver a better return on investment than any other state.

In other words, we spend less money, to get better results, with more challenging students than any other state. Sorry Max, but its not time to trade!

To return to my previous analogy, Kansas schools have designed an affordable 4x4 pick-up with comfortable seats that gets 45 mpg! But there is some bad news. We have to get better. We need to keep looking for ways to be MORE effective and MORE efficient. LPA audits can be a tool in helping us to be more efficient. The LPA audits do not tell us anything about being effective. We must have balance.

Find more information on the Tallman Index of Educational Achievement on the KASB website under About KASB, Executive Director.

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Advocating for technology means asking the right questions

Technology is disrupting public education, and it’s a good disruption! The promise of technology is to dramatically change the way teachers teach in order to meet the way students learn. In some classrooms that promise is blooming, in some that promise is still growing, yet in many the seed of that promise hasn’t even germinated. How is technology being used in your district? Is it simply taking the paper factor out, or is it being leveraged to encourage communication, collaboration and innovation? What is driving your technology decisions? Is curriculum a factor in those decisions? What about professional development?

As we gear up for another school year many districts are planning for the future through strategic plans and discussions about technology should be included. Planning for the use of technology in the classroom can be overwhelming at best and we all know implementing technology without a plan creates chaos. Knowing what is available now and what is being developed can help in planning, but keep in mind technology is an ever-changing landscape and can sometimes be a roadblock when deciding what technology to purchase.

There are four planning questions that need to be addressed as you decide what technologies fit your district needs:


One example of technology integration is the “20 percent time,” aka “Genius Hour.” This is a concept where everyone in the classroom, including the teacher, is given 20 minutes to pursue ‘pet’ projects and learning outcomes they choose. Often students go above and beyond their learning outcomes simply because they are given a conduit for their passions and interests.

Being an advocate for technology is a critical role for district leaders and board members, and being a change agent is one of the 21 Responsibilities of the School Leader (“School Leadership that Works: from Research to Results,” McREL). What does it mean to be a change agent? You consciously challenge the status quo, you lead change initiatives with uncertain outcomes, systematically consider new and better ways of doing things, and consistently attempt to operate at the edge versus the center of the district’s competence.

The culture of a district and community is a key factor in dealing with the disruption that implementing technology can create. Districts using technology successfully in the classroom foster a culture of excellence, grounded in trust, compassion and respect. As a district leader you hold the keys to successfully integrate technology, provide for a culture of innovation and be an agent of change. Ask the question: What could we be doing that we are not to prepare our students for their future?

Superintendents complete mentoring/induction

Since initiation of the service two years ago, 46 first year superintendents have completed the Kansas Educational Leadership Institute year-long mentoring/induction program.

The KELI program is based on a recommendation for developing district leadership designed by a KSSA committee in 2011. KELI is a collaborative effort of KSSA, USA, KSDE, KASB, and Kansas State University. All participants earned the professional license endorsement or credits toward license renewal.

2012-2013 Completers—Brady Anshutz, Mission Valley USD 330; Blaise Bauer, Girard USD 248; Susan Beeson, Chetopa USD 505; Kenneth Bridges, Syracuse USD 494; Mark Buck, Barber Co. North USD 254; Gail Dunbar, Plainville USD 270; Lisa Gehring, Palco USD 289; Diane Gross, Ft. Scott USD 234; David Grover, Cheney USD 268; Tim Hallacy, Silver Lake USD 372; Penny Hargrove, Hiawatha USD 415; Jerry Hann,Wellsville USD 289; Troy Hutton, Osage City USD 420; Jeff Kohlman, Chase Co. USD 284; Travis Laver, Pleasanton USD 344; Adam McDaniel, Rawlins USD 105; Josh Meyer, St. Johns-Hudson USD 350; Suzan Patton, Pratt USD 382; Josh Swartz, Anthony-Harper USD 361; and Ronald Traxson, Peabody-Burns USD 398.


Seven first year completers continued KELI participation in Year Two mentoring support during 2012-2013: Julie Ford, Shellaune Kiblinger, Lacey Sell, Dan Stiffler, Doug Sumner, Judy Welter, and Bobbi Williams.

Find out more about KELI online at http://coe.ksu.edu/annex/keli/

Engage Site Councils

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At the conclusion of the training, building leaders were able to walk away with a renewed interest and focus in the site council model as a key component to their continuous improvement efforts.

Dr. J.K. Campbell shared the following response with KASB staff following the training, “Our principals were especially appreciative of the information provided as they have struggled with how to make these meetings (site councils) valuable to participants and the school.”

Changes in the education system in Kansas have created a critical need for community engagement surrounding these foundation principles to improving schools.

Site councils can serve as a critical conduit for that engagement, and thoughtful planning and preparation will ensure that they function effectively.

For more information on this or other trainings available in your district, contact KASB at 800.432.2471.
McREL Principal Evaluation Training available for your staff

This training is intended for districts planning to utilize the McREL principal evaluation instrument. Principals and their superintendent should plan to attend this two-day training as a team to learn about how to properly use the principal evaluation system and develop an understanding of the Balanced Leadership framework that is the foundation for the McREL principal evaluation.

- **September 16-17, Clearwater**, Hosted by South Central Kansas Education Service Center
- **October 23-24, Salina**, Hosted by Smoky Hill Educational Service Center
- **October 30-31, Eudora**, Hosted by Greenbush
- **November 5-6, Girard**, Hosted by Greenbush
- **November 12-13, Hutchinson**, Hosted by ESSDACK

Registration fee for Principal Evaluation is $175 per participant.

Register on the KASB website at www.kasb.org/store.

McREL Balanced Leadership training classes added

Participants will study the “Art and Science” of leadership, and gain an understanding of the research conducted by McREL surrounding building leadership. The training is designed for leadership teams, as it is highly interactive and participants engage in reflection and dialogue about current leadership practices. If your team has been through McREL Principal Evaluation training, this a logical next step to support and deepen a building leader’s understanding of the responsibilities and practices that need to happen on a daily basis.

Dates are: October 15-16; December 11, February 4-5 and April 9-10 all at KASB. Registration fee for this seven session course is $1,000 per person. Register online at www.kasb.org/store.