



**Office of Education
Performance Audits**

EDUCATION PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORT

FOR

PHOENIX CENTER SCHOOL

MCDOWELL COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

JANUARY 2010

WEST VIRGINIA BOARD OF EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

An announced Education Performance Audit of Phoenix Center School in McDowell County was conducted November 19, 2009. The review was conducted at the specific direction of the West Virginia Board of Education. The purpose of the review was to investigate the performance and progress of the alternative school and to make recommendations to the school and school system, as appropriate, and to the West Virginia Board of Education on such measures as it considers necessary to improve performance and progress.

The Education Performance Audit Team reviewed the Five-Year Strategic Improvement Plan, interviewed school personnel and school system administrators, observed classrooms, and examined school records.

EDUCATION PERFORMANCE AUDIT TEAM

Office of Education Performance Audits Team Chair – Allen D. Brock, Coordinator

TEAM MEMBERS

Name	Title	School/County
Randall L. Auvil	High School Principal	Greenbrier West High School Greenbrier County

60 MCDOWELL COUNTY
Suzette Cook, Superintendent
530 PHOENIX CENTER SCHOOL
Katherine Sorah, Principal

EDUCATION PERFORMANCE AUDIT

HIGH QUALITY STANDARDS

Necessary to Improve Performance and Progress.

7.1. Curriculum

- 7.1.1. Curriculum based on content standards and objectives. The curriculum is based on the content standards and objectives approved by the West Virginia Board of Education. (Policy 2510; Policy 2520)**

The Team could not verify that the West Virginia 21st Century content standards and objectives (CSOs) were being addressed. The principal could not explain how the CSOs were being addressed at the school or procedures to ensure proper coverage.

- 7.1.5. Instructional strategies. Staff demonstrates the use of the various instructional strategies and techniques contained in Policies 2510 and 2520. (Policy 2510; Policy 2520)**

There was an extremely high reliance on technology use and very little application of varied instructional strategies. Students spent the majority of their day working on computer programs with very little direct instruction.

7.2. Student and School Performance

- 7.2.1. County and School electronic strategic improvement plans. An electronic county strategic improvement plan and an electronic school strategic improvement plan are established, implemented, and reviewed annually. Each respective plan shall be a five-year plan that includes the mission and goals of the school or school system to improve student or school system performance or progress. The plan shall be revised annually in each area in which the school or system is below the standard on the annual performance measures.**

The school did not have a Five-Year Strategic Plan. The principal reported that the Phoenix Center School had been included in the feeder high school plans in the past, but that was not the case during the current school year.

- 7.2.2. Counseling services. Counselors shall spend at least 75 percent of the work day in a direct counseling relationship with students, and shall devote no more than 25 percent of the work day to counseling-related administrative activities as stated in W.Va. Code §18-5-18b. (W.Va. Code §18-5-18b; Policy 2315)**

A guidance counselor was not available for students. The students at the Phoenix Center School were at-risk students and desperately needed the services of a guidance counselor.

- 7.2.3. Lesson plans and principal feedback. Lesson plans that are based on approved content standards and objectives are prepared in advance and the principal reviews, comments on them a minimum of once each quarter, and provides written feedback to the teacher as necessary to improve instruction. (Policy 2510; Policy 5310)**

There were no conventional lesson plans. The teachers relied exclusively on PLATO for lesson plans. Furthermore, there was no principal feedback on lesson plans.

- 7.2.4. Data analysis. Prior to the beginning of and through the school term the county, school, and teacher have a system for analyzing, interpreting, and using student performance data to identify and assist students who are not at grade level in achieving approved state and local content standards and objectives. The county, principal, counselors, and teachers assess student scores on the American College Test and the Scholastic Aptitude Test and develop curriculum, programs, and/or practices to improve student and school performance. (Policy 2510)**

While the principal stated that WESTEST 2 data were examined, other forms of data were not being utilized. Areas such as discipline, attendance, and the reasons for the student being assigned to the Phoenix Center School were not being utilized. Student Assistant Team (SAT) information involving behavior plans or interventions was available for teacher use.

7.8. Leadership

- 7.8.1. Leadership. Leadership at the school district, school, and classroom levels is demonstrated by vision, school culture and instruction, management and environment, community, and professionalism. (Policy 5500.03)**

Due to the number and seriousness of deficiencies found at the Phoenix Center School, the Team determined that central office administration, the West Virginia Department of Education, and RESA assist the building administrator in the school's operation.

Indicators of Efficiency

Indicators of efficiency for student and school system performance and processes were reviewed in the following areas: Curriculum delivery, including but not limited to, the use of distance learning; facilities; administrative practices; personnel; utilization of regional education service agency, or other regional services that may be established by their assigned regional education service agency. This section contains indicators of efficiency that the Education Performance Audit Team assessed as requiring more efficient and effective application.

The indicators of efficiency listed are intended to guide the Phoenix Center School in providing a thorough and efficient system of education. McDowell County is obligated to follow the Indicators of Efficiency noted by the Team. Indicators of Efficiency shall not be used to affect the approval status of McDowell County or the accreditation status of the schools.

8.1.1. Curriculum. The school district and school conduct an annual curriculum audit regarding student curricular requests and overall school curriculum needs, including distance learning in combination with accessible and available resources.

Given the small number of students at the school and the at-risk status of the students, the number and quality of deficiencies found by the Team were highly detrimental to the students and presented a major risk of increased student dropout rates.

These issues are very important and the Phoenix Center School and McDowell County are urged to seek assistance from appropriate experts at the West Virginia Department of Education to provide an efficient and effective education for these students.

Building Capacity to Correct Deficiencies

West Virginia Code §18-2E-5 establishes that the needed resources are available to assist the school or school system in achieving the standards and alleviating the deficiencies identified in the assessment and accountability process. To assist Phoenix Center School in achieving capacity, the following resources are recommended.

- 18.1. Capacity building is a process for targeting resources strategically to improve the teaching and learning process. School and county electronic strategic improvement plan development is intended, in part, to provide mechanisms to target resources strategically to the teaching and learning process to improve student, school, and school system performance.**

The Team recommended that the McDowell County School System Superintendent and the school administrator contact Dr. Karen Huffman, Assistant Superintendent, Division of Educator Quality and System Support at 304-558-3199 to arrange a School Support System for correcting the deficiencies and improving student and school performance.

Identification of Resource Needs

A thorough and efficient system of schools requires the provision of an adequate level of appropriately managed resources. The West Virginia Board of Education adopted resource evaluation as a part of the accreditation and evaluation process. This process is intended to meaningfully evaluate the needs for facilities, personnel, curriculum, equipment and materials in each of the county's schools and how those impact program and student performance.

19.1. Facilities, equipment, and materials. Facilities and equipment specified in Policy 6200, Chapters 1 through 14, are available in all schools, classrooms, and other required areas. A determination will be made by using the Process for Improving Education (W.Va. Code §18-2E-5) whether any identified deficiencies adversely impact and impair the delivery of a high quality educational program if it is below the West Virginia Board of Education standards due to inadequacies or inappropriate management in the areas of facilities, equipment, and materials. The Education Performance Audit Teams shall utilize an assessment instrument for the evaluation of school facilities which generally follows the requirements of Policy 6200. Note: Corrective measures to be taken in response to any identified resource deficiency will of necessity be subject to the feasibility of modifying existing facilities, consideration of alternative methods of instructional delivery, availability of funding, and prioritization of educational needs through Comprehensive Educational Facilities Plans and the West Virginia School Building Authority. This policy does not change the authority, judgment, or priorities of the School Building Authority of West Virginia who is statutorily responsible for prioritizing "Need" for the purpose of funding school improvements or school construction in the State of West Virginia or the prerogative of the Legislature in providing resources. (Policy 6200 and *Tomblin v. Gainer*)

None identified.

The McDowell County Education Performance Audit Report presents serious facility issues at the Phoenix Center School. Refer to the Regulatory Agency Section of that report.

Early Detection and Intervention

One of the most important elements in the Education Performance Audit process is monitoring student progress through early detection and intervention programs.

The School Support System presented under the Capacity Building Section will be an invaluable resource in guiding school improvement.

Education Performance Audit Summary

The Team identified seven high quality standards necessary to improve performance and progress.

They include the following:

- 7.1.1. Curriculum based on content standards and objectives.
- 7.1.5. Instructional strategies.
- 7.2.1. County and School electronic strategic improvement plans.
- 7.2.2. Counseling services.
- 7.2.3. Lesson plans and principal feedback.
- 7.2.4. Data analysis.
- 7.8.1. Leadership.

The Team noted an indicator of efficiency and noted an early detection and intervention concern.

Phoenix Center School's Education Performance Audit was limited in scope to the progress standards related to student and school performance. The Team also conducted a resource evaluation to assess the resource needs of the school. The Team submits this initial report to guide Phoenix Center School in improvement efforts.

Section 17.10. of West Virginia Board of Education Policy 2320 states:

If during an on-site review, a school or county board is found to be in noncompliance with one or more standards, the school and county electronic strategic improvement plans must be revised and shall be submitted to the West Virginia Board of Education within 30 days of receipt of the draft written report. The plans shall include objectives, a time line, a plan for evaluation of the success of the improvements, a cost estimate and a date certain for achieving full accreditation and/or full approval status as applicable.

Based upon the results of the Education Performance Audit, the Office of Education Performance Audits recommends that the West Virginia Board of Education direct Phoenix Center School and McDowell County to revise the school's Five-Year Strategic Plan within 30 days and correct the findings noted in the report.