

2017-2018 COMMUNITY REVIEW COMMITTEE

Audit Report

May 21, 2018

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Introduction

The Community Review Committee (CRC) “serves in an advisory capacity to Wilmette Public Schools District 39 Board of Education to research specific topics that will lead to improvements in teaching, learning or managing the District’s operations.” The purpose of this audit report is to gauge both the status of recommendations set forth in the 2013-2014 CRC report entitled, “Developing a 21st Century Learning Infrastructure” and the successes achieved by their adoption. The recommendations in that report pertained to the construction and support of Learning Commons, the integration of technology, and practices associated with mobile learning devices. As you will learn from the audit report which follows, District 39 adopted almost every recommendation from the 2013-2014 CRC, and in the rare instance where it didn’t adopt a recommendation exactly, it sought to follow its spirit and intent. In many cases, the results of adopting the CRC’s recommendations actually exceeded the district’s expectations. CRC is, by its nature, a very “grown up” endeavor. Its membership is comprised entirely of adults, its meetings occur at the district office during non-school hours, and its reports are presented to a board of education which is also comprised entirely of adults. However, the work of D39 is done on behalf of children, and the CRC is proud to serve in an advisory capacity to aid the district in this important work. While this report will go through each recommendation one by one, it shouldn’t be lost that the true effect of constructed Learning Commons, integrated technology, and the use of mobile learning devices is the increased learning opportunities for the children who benefit from them.

Background

Among the recommendations made by the 2015-2016 CRC, which were embraced by the District 39 Board of Education, was that future CRCs conduct audits of its reports three years after their completion. The 2015-2016 CRC also developed both a template for future CRCs to follow when writing its reports and a rubric for future CRCs to follow when auditing its reports. In addition to presenting the results of its audit of the 2012-2013 report, the 2016-2017 CRC created both an improved template and an improved rubric for use by future CRCs. The 2016-2017 report entitled “School Climate” was the first CRC report written following this improved template. Because the School Climate report was the first CRC report to follow the parameters of the recommended template, and because all prior CRCs did not have the benefit of this template when crafting their reports, the 2017-2018 CRC recommends the following with respect to future audits of its reports:

1. that the Community Review Committee continues to audit reports three years after their completion
2. that next year’s audit of the 2014-2015 report entitled “Cultivating Growth Minded, Resilient Students” focus on the status of and successes resulting from the adoption of recommendations in that report and not how well it adhered to a rubric that was developed post-report
3. that the first report to be put through the audit rubric as part of its audit should be the 2016-2017 report on School Climate

In line with this thinking, this year's audit of the 2013-2014 report entitled "Developing a 21st Century Learning Infrastructure" includes a determination of the status of and successes achieved by the adoption of recommendations made in that report.. It does not address whether that report adhered to the audit rubric, as that was developed after the report was written.

Audit

The 2013-2014 CRC made thirteen recommendation to District 39 to aid it in "Developing a 21st Century Learning Infrastructure." In order to determine where things stand in District 39 with respect to the adoption of these recommendations and successes associated with them, Audit Subcommittee Chair Erin Stone conducted interviews in early 2018 with two D39 administrators: Dr. Raymond Lechner, Superintendent, and Tony DeMonte, Director of Technology & Media Services. Both the recommendations made by the 2013-2014 CRC and their current status and resulting successes, as described by D39 administrators, are outlined below:

Recommendation #1:

"The CRC Committee recommends that District 39, in partnership with all education stakeholders, develop a three year plan that articulates a vision and outlines a strategy for systematically integrating technology into the classroom, improving instruction and increasing academic success."

This recommendation was adopted. As outlined in a document presented to the Board of Education in December 2015, goals were written to address needed improvements in the areas of technology curriculum, professional development, staffing, and devices/spaces/infrastructure.¹ Mr. DeMonte reported that in the intervening time since that vision and long-term planning was set forth, the District has reached almost all of its goals in this area. In addition, Dr. Lechner related that "academic success" was defined based on the "4 C's" of 21st century learning" (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity). Data with respect to these academic successes has been collected at five of the six District 39 schools, the exception being Highcrest, due to the fact that it currently does not have a Learning Commons. Construction of a Learning Commons at Highcrest is anticipated in the future.

Recommendation #2:

"Develop Grade Level Content Standards and Related Curriculum. In addition to, or as part of a district technology planning effort, the CRC recommends that District 39 provide clearer guidance and recommendations on what students should know and be able to do with, and within, technology by grade level."

¹ http://www.wilmette39.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_360846/File/Board%20of%20Ed/publicpacket/2015-12-14.html

This recommendation was adopted. Not only was the technology curriculum reviewed and updated, but the revamped curriculum created more depth and room for advancement. The district also conducted its first ever review of curricula for both technology and libraries, which, although occurring simultaneously, honored the two as separate disciplines. The results of this review will allow the district to stay current and be flexible to adapt to changes in these areas. While the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) does not have library or technology standards, the district aligned its library standards to those created by the Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE), and it aligned its technology standards to those created by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE). D39 purposely left its own curriculum standards very broad in the area of technology because things in this field change so quickly. In the process of developing a digital citizenship curriculum, D39 collaborated with other school districts in New Trier Township, as the goal was to get all of the New Trier feeder districts on the same page.

In addition, the D39 technology and library department was also revamped with the goal of achieving a more efficient model to better address the existing needs in each building. The district has a Director of Technology & Media Services, who is someone who oversees anything related to technology and libraries. Because the district found during its review that school staff members needed immediate access to technology experts, there is now a technician in every single school, all of whom are IT professionals. In addition to there being a librarian in each school, K-4 schools also have a technology teacher who not only sees classes but who also has flexible time in which s/he helps teachers infuse technology into their own instruction. Similarly, grades 5-8 have “tech coaches” who help teachers integrate technology into their classrooms and lessons.

Recommendation #3:

“To ensure that the district has the staff it would need to implement a technology plan and to successfully build the technological teaching skills of district educators, the CRC recommends that the district evaluate its existing staffing structure. The CRC encourages District 39 to consider creating a new position or to re-distribute current staff responsibilities in order to employ a Technology Curriculum Coordinator/21st Century Learning Specialist, who would work closely with the current Director of Technology and Media Services and the Director of Curriculum and Instruction to develop new curriculum, tools, and professional development to ensure infusion, utilization and transformation across District 39.”

The District did review and consider this recommendation, but ultimately, it was not implemented according to the exact language in the recommendation. However, the district’s contention is that the work intended to be done by the creation or re-distribution of staff is indeed occurring. As noted above, the organization of the technology and library department was revamped to better support 1:1 learning and use of Learning Commons. Furthermore, stipends were created and are given to one librarian and one tech person in the district who help with curriculum development in these areas.

Recommendation #4:

“In response to input the CRC received from teachers and staff and in accordance with best practices, the CRC recommends that the district develop a comprehensive technology professional development plan.”

This recommendation was adopted. A few current examples of the professional development occurring in this area include: (1) an outside professional on digital citizenship coming in for the D39 teacher institute day on February 19, 2018, (2) tech teachers/coaches and librarians providing training during staff meetings, and (3) some building administrators plus every D39 technology teacher and librarian (save the one who is retiring) being registered to attend the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) conference in Chicago from June 24-27, 2018.

Recommendation #5:

“The CRC recommends that innovation in the best practices of technology implementation and integration should be supported, encouraged and recognized.”

This recommendation was adopted. The district placed a priority on adopting innovative and best practices, and in doing so, hired consultants who contributed student-centered ideas both before and after implementation occurred. When the curriculum was developed, any staff members in the district’s technology and library media department who wanted to to the conference of the Illinois Computing Educators (ICE) were sent. In addition, as noted earlier, D39 staff members are scheduled to go to the upcoming ISTE conference in June 2018. Dr. Lechner stressed the point that the use of D39 Learning Commons and the amount of resulting opportunities for students to both experience and exercise the 21st century skills of the “4 C’s” have “exceeded expectations.” Finally, both Highcrest Middle School and Wilmette Junior High have been recognized as “Apple Distinguished Schools.” As noted by Mr. DeMonte, this distinction is not only recognition for the district’s hard work in integrating best practices in the area of technology, but it has also resulted in other school districts coming to look at D39 as an example of what best practices look like in action.

Recommendation #6:

“Each District 39 school should continue the planning for a Learning Commons, with the assistance of a planning professional that specializes in the development of 21st century learning spaces with the assistance of the learning commons website developed by District 39 staff.”

This recommendation was adopted. As noted above, Learning Commons now exist in all D39 schools with the exception of Highcrest. It is anticipated that a Learning Commons will be built at Highcrest in the future. In addition, a planning professional/consultant has helped support the creation of the Learning Commons and continues to provide support to maximize possibilities for their use.

Recommendation #7:

“Create a state of the art Learning Commons at Central School that will act as a prototype for District 39. Explore similar opportunities for other schools in the district to be implemented in the near future.”

This recommendation was adopted. The first Learning Commons built in D39 was at Central School, and all other district schools (with the exception of Highcrest, where it is anticipated that one will be built in the future) have since followed suit. Dr. Lechner noted that with the construction of every school’s Learning Commons, the district learned from each experience and became more efficient. For example, while Central School’s Learning Commons has a “green screen room,” the other schools do not, as the district learned that they did not need one but could instead have a green wall or green cloth to achieve the same effect. In addition, another effect of building a Learning Commons prototype at Central School is that in doing so, District 39 has become a model and leader in 21st century learning spaces both locally and nationally. As of early February, 2018, at least 37 different school districts have toured the Central School Learning Commons, with some school districts visiting more than once. In addition, D39 staff have presented on the topic at numerous conferences and have also had an article on the subject published in a national library journal.

Recommendation #8:

“District 39 should experiment with new staffing models to allow for staffing and supporting the learning commons.”

This recommendation was adopted. While administration noted that this varies from school to school, it related that it tried to integrate learning behavior specialists, differentiation support teachers, technology teachers, and librarians in a collaborative effort to develop instructional materials. Every Learning Commons has a library paraprofessional working in it to provide support where needed. As noted earlier, there is also a full-time technician working at each school. When these technicians are not assisting staff across their buildings, they are stationed in the Learning Commons. There, they are not only accessible to students and staff, but they also provide support to younger students during technology and library classes. Finally, administration reported that once built, the Learning Commons resulted in a great deal more co-teaching, collaboration, and co-planning among school staff members that the district had originally anticipated.

Recommendation #9:

“Combine all policies regarding acceptable use into one coherent document for students and parents/caregivers.”

This recommendation was adopted. This information can be found on the D39 website in the subsection, “Technology & Library Media Services” under the “About Us” section.

Recommendation #10:

“Title the policy ‘Responsible Use Policy for Technology’ as this communicates a positive expectation for student use of this useful educational tool. Additionally, do not refer specifically to iPads, but word the policy, ‘including, but not limited to ...’, to provide for any additional technologies that may be introduced in the future.”

This recommendation was not adopted, per se, according to its exact language and specifications, but the essence of this recommendation seems to have been implemented by the district. Instead of the phrase “responsible use,” the phrase “acceptable use” is used instead. In addition, positive expectations are communicated in the “Student’s Acceptable Use Procedures for Electronic Devices” section by statements that begin with language such as, “I will use,” “I will only use,” “I will turn off,” and “I take full responsibility.” In addition, while iPads are mentioned specifically, the phrase “electronic device” or “device” are used more frequently.

Recommendation #11:

“District 39 should review the technology fees associated with 1:1 roll outs in comparable districts. Using this information and District 39’s financial projections, an appropriate fee structure should be determined.”

This recommendation was adopted. Also, reviewing practices in comparable districts led D39 to change its fee options over time, most notably eliminating the “rent-to-own” option. In addition, after finding that 90% of the needed repairs to iPads were due to screen breakage, the district switched the cases being used, which saw the demand for repairs drop 50%. The district also started charging for the first repair and rolled lost/stolen insurance into the fees.

Recommendation #12:

“Prohibit ‘Personal Software’ and ‘Personal Content on the Mobile Device’ on the technological device purchased by/through District 39 to be used for educational purposes. That would require removing Policy #11 and Policy #12 from the policy developed for the current 6th grade iPad Pilot.”

This recommendation was adopted. Whereas policies #11 and #12 in the iPad Pilot program allowed for personal software and content on mobile devices, no such allowance is included in the “Student’s Acceptable Use Procedures for Electronic Devices” found on the D39 website. Instead, a student agrees to abide by a statement that says, in part, “I will use my device for school work only[.]” In addition, the district implemented a mobile device management program called JAMF Pro two years ago. That implementation saw a drop in disciplinary cases related to inappropriate iPad use, as the App Store was removed and student devices are now completely controlled by District 39.

Recommendation #13:

“District 39 should create a multi-faceted internal and external communications plan around the current and planned uses of technology that focuses on the key benefits to the learner, the improvements to teaching and learning, and clearly articulates how the initiative supports and reinforces the goals in the CONNECTED strategic plan. The plan should be developed as part of District 39-wide technology plan’s planning process, mentioned in the first recommendation.”

This recommendation was adopted. Administration conveyed that this did indeed occur, and as noted earlier, it centered around the “4 C’s of 21st century learning” (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity).

Conclusion

As outlined above, almost all of the recommendations set forth by the 2013-2014 CRC were adopted by District 39. In many cases, the results stemming from the adoption of these recommendation exceeded district expectations. The CRC recommends that it continue to audit its past reports, as doing so will provide as both a check and reflection on the past work of CRC as well as highlighting potential areas where the district might further improve the teaching, learning or managing of its operations.