



Liverpool Central School District

Organizational Study

MaryEllen Elia

Success For Students, Inc.



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Abstract

Liverpool Central School is a highly rated suburban school district in the Syracuse area of Central New York. It serves approximately 6,800 students K-12 in 13 schools. The District developed a plan with community input to establish a new set of boundaries as part of their Education 2020 Initiative. Redrawing the boundaries provided a better balance related to enrollment, programs, and staff. Additionally, the plan allowed for a greater emphasis on student achievement and support while more efficiently utilizing the existing schools. This restructuring required extensive community input led by the School Board, Dr. Mark Potter, Superintendent, and Deputy Superintendent Dan Henner. Soon after the plan was approved, Dr. Potter announced his retirement and the School Board began a comprehensive nationwide search and ultimately, named Mr. Henner the new superintendent to begin his duties July 1, 2022.

Shortly after the announcement of his selection as the new Superintendent, Mr. Henner proposed an outside consultant be interviewed and identified to review the organizational structure that had been in place in Liverpool under his predecessors. Mr. Henner had been Liverpool's Deputy Superintendent since 2018 and prior to that had been Superintendent in a nearby district. In that time, the district had developed Education 2020 Initiative mentioned above. While the plan was being vetted in the community and a staged implementation planned, Liverpool faced the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic where schools had to determine how they could meet their students' needs in a new learning environment. After July 2022 when a more "normal" environment existed, Liverpool was rethinking their "way of work" to focus on a district redesign of their schools to better serve students in the 21st century.

The organization of departments within the district has not been the focus over the last several years. As individuals left their positions, in some cases they were not filled or the responsibility was added on to an existing position, even though they were important functions that needed to occur. This led to continuous layering of new responsibilities into positions and divisions without ensuring comparable levels of support and resources. There are many reasons that this practice was followed: funding; overload on important agendas that took the time from the leadership; Covid-19 issues.

The study focus was to provide the Board and Superintendent with recommendations on the organizational structure related to three areas: Instructional Organization, Business Functions including Human Resources, Business Office and Legal Services, and Communications. With this charge, the Study method was direct and pragmatic: interview all the central office administrators, all the principals, representatives of the employee organizations, support staff and the school board members. (These interviews were voluntary and not everyone had the interest nor the time to attend.) An excellent representative group was available. Everyone was cooperative, helpful, and cordial. Individuals were very supportive of the district, wanting to talk about areas that they believed needed change, but underscoring their belief that Liverpool staff are dedicated in all areas to work together to support every child.

The **Findings** Section of the Report is a result of synthesizing those informal conversations/discussions, reviewing documents, and adding to this from the Consultant's experience, knowledge, and expertise. The **Recommendations** are a direct result of the Findings and are organized by each of the areas discussed with the study participants. These recommendations are meant to be guidelines, not prescriptions.

Findings

Instructional Organization

The 2022-23 school year started in Liverpool with many changes. Those included teachers being moved to different grade levels/different schools; students being reassigned to new campuses; some teachers having to float between different campuses; school schedules that did not accommodate PLC work. Many stresses were caused by a return from the protocols of Covid-19 while the district implemented Education 2020. This was difficult and was exasperated by some of the realities of the Organization.

In the current Organizational structure, there is no leader of the Executive Directors related to Instruction and all the associated areas. As issues come up, actions/decisions are influenced by this “no one in charge” reality. This contributes to a “silo mentality” and encourages each department to do what is necessary to have their departments “get things done”. From a school perspective, the Instructional staff appears to be in a “world” of their own.

Technology needs to be clarified to address both Institutional Technology and Instructional Technology. Currently one Director oversees both with little involvement in the use of technology in the classrooms. This is clearly understood given the recent state regulations related to cyber safety (2D Law). However, with the heavy investments made in providing equipment for all, teachers and principals need to be supported in using the most successful ways to incorporate the use of technology across all curriculum areas. There are some support staff for technology, but it is not a comprehensive program.

Current responsibilities for related Instructional K-12 areas, such as English as a New Language (ENL), Section 504, and Response to Intervention (RTI) are assigned to the Executive Director for Elementary Education. These areas warrant the need for the focus to be with all K-12 Instructional Staff in areas that have a natural connection. These responsibilities should be assigned to Instructional staff.

Director of Staff Services needs to be working closely with the Instructional Staff since many of their duties in Assessment should be used to support strong instructional practices at all schools and in all classrooms. It is more than just reporting data, it requires working closely with the Instructional staff as well as the principals to provides data that can drive instruction and identify important trends districtwide that require action. This is a very important role in the district that needs to create usable and straightforward reports that can be used by every teacher, principal, and instructional leader to support continuous improvement.

The Director of Student Services responsibilities are also closely related to Instruction and should be working in tandem with all instructional staff and school principals. Although this coordination is occurring, it is not reflected in the organizational structure. This includes student registration, as well as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Program, Foster care, tutors for in-home student support, and the Alternative Learning Center. Having Student Services more closely aligned with Instruction will better serve some of the districts' most at-risk students.

Principals are a critical group upon which student success rests. Learning that happens in every classroom is dependent on the culture and environment created in each school to support teachers. There does not seem to be consistent support from the curriculum departments at the district level. Principals generally said that their strongest support comes from each other—with strong support from the Executive Director for Elementary Education. A close working

relationship between District staff and Principals fosters a team approach to bring success to students. An example of this disconnect is that when district instructional staff visit schools, they seldom interact with the principals and discuss what they observed in classrooms.

There doesn't seem to be consistency in how schools are administered. It depends on the experience, knowledge, and connections of the principal. There is no system of distributing information. Processes that should be common in all schools aren't identified and followed. This is generally indicative of a lack of systems and processes.

Executive Team meetings are held but the agenda is not distributed and there should be a standing set of topics from each member as well as strategic topics related to the long-term district plans. Important decisions seem to be made by a few Administrators without input from a wider group of key staff.

Across all departments in the district, there is no plan for staff development for all employees. This includes principals, administrators, department heads, coaches, teachers, teacher assistants, bus drivers, all custodial and maintenance staff, basically everyone. A good example is a new secretary having a Manual that can guide them in any questions they have and give them a reference as to who to call if they still need help. Or a new Principal for that matter.

An important area that should have consistent development is the district coaches in specific areas—Science, Math, Instructional Technology, Literacy. These individuals are in schools primarily and should have consistency across the district. This would also streamline the process for Professional Development so that a plan would be developed each year based on the district strategic plans, with target groups, schedules, agendas, and funding sources identified.

There is a lack of consistency in following the negotiated contracts in place in the district. Examples that were discussed include sick time, vacation time, employee discipline issues and many others. Principals and department leaders need to understand the importance of consistency and that needs to be driven by the Administration and the HR department. Any decisions or developments regarding issues brought to the HR department should have resolution and feedback given to the pertinent parties in a timely way. It shouldn't just fall off the page.

Hiring has been particularly difficult with the implementation of the Education 2020 Initiative. Because of a lack of systems and procedures that should be reviewed regularly by those they affect, periods of time have gone by without the actual job offering and acceptance of new employees, especially teachers. Constant communication will decrease the stress felt at these critical times.

Curricula should be consistent across all schools. This will underscore the importance of strong staff development, consistency in what is being taught and the resources used in district classrooms. There should be controls in what is purchased and supported so that there is strong alignment with the approved curricula.

There are District Professional Development Grant Programs that seemingly do not have consistent implementation that would support continuous improvement. This should be reviewed and revised with all parties developing guidelines that better support more expansive Professional Development for all.

Business Functions – Including HR, Business Office and Legal Services

Human Resources is a critical Division in a school district. It must be driven by strong systems, processes and procedures that are applied consistently in all circumstances. When hiring, all the procedures must be followed—from advertising for positions, to checking references, to interview protocols, to offering positions through the onboarding of new staff with information related to all employees. And all this needs to be done as quickly as possible so that the best people get hired for Liverpool. Consistent feedback that I received was that the process gets bogged down mainly because processes and procedures are not established and there is lag time when action is taken by the HR Department to finally offer the positions to prospective employees.

When issues come forward regarding employee behavior, there is a lack of consistency in consequences, even though it may be clear in contract language what should occur, i.e., rules related to sick time, vacation time. The most common comments regarding Human Resources that I heard is that there is a lack of HR guidelines, processes, procedures, job descriptions that ultimately effects consistency for all employees across all departments and schools.

The Business Functions of a district are extremely important as they relate to appropriate tracking of all funds, controls on expenditures, as well as tracking of appropriate use of funds for specific programs and school needs. Additionally, payroll for district employees as well as retirement funds for employees rely on the Business Division of the District. The HR Department should oversee hiring employees and then Business Administration should provide all the information on their employment- their payroll, attendance, benefits, worker’s compensation, and retirement information. This shift in responsibilities will more appropriately assign this responsibility.

The Executive Director of School Business Administration has most recently been providing information and training to school principals and their staff on processes for purchasing, etc. This sharing of information is very helpful since the budget processes and procedures at schools is very often not understood, especially if there is a turnover in staff and no historical information to give to the new employees. This is the first step in establishing the processes and procedures for budgeting and purchasing that all departments will benefit from.

The Business Department needs to continue to digitize their records and continue to embrace training for leaders on the financial processes and procedures, financial calendar, and software updates as they occur. As software is upgraded, the district needs to follow up with providing the funds and training to all departments.

Liverpool has recently hired an in-house attorney. This individual is experienced in School District legal areas such as employee discipline, Special Education, custody issues, state regulations and processes and procedures related to Human Resources. This should be a support in establishing consistent processes and procedures related to all district personnel, not only in HR but across all employee groups and departments. This will also offer opportunities to decrease the District's expenditures around Legal Services although there will still be a need in some specialized areas for outside firms to support the District.

Communications

Communications, both internal and external, in Liverpool CSD has not been a strong focus and consequently is disorganized in its approach. It is an important function for everyone in the District. There should be a plan for both internal and external communications that is distributed districtwide that delineates the responsibilities of each leader as a communicator whether that be

the school board, a school principal, a department, or a music director. Communications cannot be solely in the hands of the School Information Officer.

Internal communication to all employees is a critical function. When information about the district, or an incident in a school or district site is not shared with the employees that affects their perception of themselves as team members who deserve to be informed. A protocol should be established so that information is automatically shared when appropriate.

An internal Liverpool planning calendar should be established and shared in February/March for the following school year, with milestones outlined and adhered to so that decisions are made early in the year. The example that was shared related to the bell schedules for schools that were not established until summer when there was a need for critical coordination relating to schedules for special teachers, RTI and PLCs that was held up due to the late decision making. Important information regarding Special Education placements and their unique needs should be communicated early in the summer so that accommodations can be made early in the planning. The communications function would benefit greatly by established guidelines outlining the process for who, what and how the process should occur. This is such an important process that it should be overseen weekly so that no department falls behind since it affects all schools and departments.

Regarding external communication, Liverpool is a close-knit community that supports Liverpool CSD and to continue to receive their support, they need to know what is going on in their schools. Each school and department have unique programs and activities that it is important to share with parents and the public. Consistent “branding” for all communication, including templates to be used by all “communicators” would be helpful in connecting parents and the community to Liverpool CSD.

Although there are “webmasters” identified at each school, there is no specific job description or training, and it seems that there is great variability as to their role in communicating important information.

Social Media is an important tool that connects a large percentage of the community—whether it be Facebook, Twitter, School webpages etc.—they all should be part of the communication plan.

Liverpool instituted “Parent Square” as a communication tool for the district, However, there seems to be great variability in how and when it is used across schools. There also seems to be issues regarding language translations available to receivers. There needs to be consistency in the guidelines being followed by all participants. Some individuals indicated that there are just too many messages going out through Parent Square that leads to overload and parents ignoring them because there are just too many. A good example came from a district employee with 3 children in various schools throughout the district. He said he just couldn’t get to Parent Square communications even though he knew the family might miss something important—it just took too much time.

Recommendations

Instructional Organization

1. Establish an Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment. This will better support all areas of Instruction and help to decrease the “silo mentality”. This person would oversee the “Teaching and Learning” and coalesce their staff with a focus on continuous learning districtwide.
2. Establish a Director of Staff Development that would report to the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment as well as the Deputy Superintendent. This would support training of **all** employee groups- an individual to work with all departments to schedule, organize and determine funding sources for all training and development. This would require close work with the Instructional Division, but due to its dual placement with the Deputy, it underscores that all groups need training and development, both Instructional and Non-Instructional.
3. Upgrade the Director of Staff Services to the Executive Director of Staff Services and Assessment and report to the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment. This is a critical function to be included in all the Instructional areas so that data decisions drive continuous improvement. Teachers will benefit greatly with a focus on their students’ current achievement and possible projected performance.
4. Upgrade the Director of Student Services to Executive Director for Student Services with added duties of oversight of Social Workers, Nurses, Psychologists (currently has oversight of Guidance Counselors). Although each of these professionals work closely with certain

departments (psychologists with Special Education) they also must work in all schools to support all students. This position should report to the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Curriculum and Assessment. The areas currently assigned to this position are not related to HR and should be connected closely to those working in schools.

5. Expand the functions included in the responsibility of the Special Education Department. Change the title to Executive Director for Special Education and Student Interventions. Move both 504 and the responsibility for the Response to Intervention (RTI) to the new Department. Although there are differences in these programs, there are more similarities in administering them and working on supporting identified students in all schools, including Elementary, Middle and High School. Department staff would need to be examined carefully to provide needed resources which may be able to be funded from federal funds.
6. Change the title of the Executive Director for Humanities to Executive Director for English/Language Arts, Social Studies and Humanities and move the responsibility for the English as a New Language (ENL) Program to this position. Supports for ENL should be embedded in all curricula and should be a component of all training provided to principals, teachers and assistant teachers and ancillary services.
7. Review the staffing model for the High School and review the responsibilities of each administrator. There are a high number of Principals at one site. Additionally, the Executive Principal seems to be “shared” with the Deputy Superintendent and often is “pulled” to other areas and departments.
8. The designation of one of the Principals as the CTE administrator has been very helpful in expanding CTE options to all high school students. This also demands expanded programming

in the Middle Schools and even into the Elementary Schools which then requires a different placement in the organization. This position should be expanded and become a permanent Instructional Director.

9. There should be a review of administrative staff at Elementary and Middle schools and a formula established based on the student body size. Currently, there is one principal at all Elementary and Middle Schools but no assistant principals. Establishing a formula would focus the decision on student numbers and need rather than just past practice.
10. Consider the establishment of Department Chairs for the Middle Schools. This would greatly support the principals' work in curriculum as well as the teachers as they support students' needs. It would also aid in establishing a data driven continuous improvement model. If this recommendation is implemented, it should be a joint selection process with the Instructional Departments.
11. Similarly, the Elementary School Grade Level Lead teachers can greatly support consistency in curriculum across classrooms and informed use of data to support improvement. If this recommendation is implemented, it should be a joint selection process with the Instructional Departments.
12. Consider a “delayed start” or “early dismissal” to expand the time available for Professional Development. If this occurs, there should be established agendas of the PD so that it is focused and strongly contributes to improvement in classrooms and support for all students. The issue of Professional Learning Communities came up in several conversations—If that district goal was established, then it must be “baked “into everything that goes on, including common understanding, scheduling, professional learning, etc.

13. Develop a principal and Instructional staff protocol for data sharing, school goal setting, building visits and walkthroughs to see how teachers are being evaluated and what the plan is for support and expansion of good to great.
14. The growth approach for all employees should be focused on training, support, guidance, and accountability. This should be consistent throughout all Professional Development in the district with a team approach to improvement.

Business Functions: Including HR, Business Office and Legal Services

1. Establish systems and procedures related to all functions and responsibilities of the HR Department. These would include the hiring, screening, selection, and onboarding of all employees. These should be established in conjunction with a representative group of department leaders and then distributed to all sites and departments so that everyone is using the same procedures and following the same guidelines. Guidelines should also include the time that each action should take and the communication that corresponds to that part of the process. The committee involved should meet biannually to review the procedures and make any changes necessary.
2. Update and/or develop job descriptions for every job that is in the district. This should include input from existing staff in those jobs. It is important to critically review these descriptions regularly as they should be the foundation for expectations and evaluations.
3. Processes and procedures related to employee discipline should be established and distributed to principals and department leaders. Consistency is very important related to this area so that everyone sees all employees being treated fairly and equally.

4. Key information regarding the contracts with employee groups should be shared with department leaders and principals so that there is a common understanding regarding the “rules”—again, this speaks to consistency.
5. The district in-house attorney should be very involved in the development of all processes and procedures.
6. Establish an Assistant Superintendent for Business Administration and Finance (CFO) reporting to the Deputy Superintendent and eliminate the current position of Executive Director of School Business Administration. Move the responsibility of personnel benefits to this office from the HR department. Currently, this responsibility is not solely in the School Business Administration Office although this is the department that is responsible for payroll and tracking of employee data. This action will centralize the responsibility for employee data, payroll, attendance, benefits, worker’s compensation, and retirement information. This leader needs to be responsible for establishing systems and procedures that support a strong finance function as well as training all departments on purchasing and budgeting.
7. The Business and Finance department should continue to digitize District systems.

Communications

1. The responsibility for Communication should sit with the Deputy Superintendent who needs to monitor progress each week.
2. A calendar for both Internal and External Communication should be developed in conjunction with a Communications Committee made up of District staff, Principals, Teachers, Parents and Community members. Content to be communicated as well as responsible parties should be

identified. This should include district website, social media as well as more traditional tools. (Newsletters and other printed communications).

3. An outside communications service such as BOCES offers would be very helpful in setting up the Liverpool Plan, both internal and external, and creating a common branding template for all district sites/programs communications. Ultimately, decisions on staffing this important function will have to be made, but establishing a plan with systems, processes. and procedures will do much to lessen the scope of the work.
4. Training and expectations should be shared across the district so that everyone charged with any communication responsibility understands the plan and the timelines.
5. Protocols for Parent Square, other parent communication tools, websites, and social media, as well as communication related to emergency situations should be established and disseminated so that there is consistency across sites

Conclusions

Reorganizations are usually difficult because it brings change. Liverpool will not be an exception. However, I believe that the changes will be less disruptive due to a very professional staff, a realization that change is necessary, and a thoughtful Board of Education and Superintendent.

Also, although the recommendations are changes to the current structure, a total reorganization is not being recommended. Much of the current structure would remain in place. The recommendations in this report reflect a layering of new responsibilities into positions and divisions without ensuring comparable levels of support and necessary resources. These issues should be addressed over time after thoughtful consideration.

It has been an honor to work in a district which is so welcoming and professional in their approach.