



Administrative Center

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Bicentennial North

7237 W Missouri
(623) 237-4009

Bicentennial South

7240 W. Colter
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Challenger

6905 W. Maryland
(623) 237-4011

Coyote Ridge

7677 W. Bethany Home
(623)237-4015

Desert Garden

7020 W. Ocotillo
(623) 237-4014

Desert Spirit

7355 W. Orangewood
(623) 237-4016

Discovery

7910 W. Discovery
(623)237-4013

Don Mensendick

5535 N 67th Avenue
(623) 237-4006

Glendale American

8530 N. 55th Avenue
(623) 237-4008

Glendale Landmark

5730 W. Myrtle
(623) 237-4001

Glenn F. Burton

4801 W. Maryland
(623) 237-4007

Harold W. Smith

6534 N 63rd Avenue
(623) 237-4003

Horizon

8520 N. 47th Avenue
(623) 237-4010

Isaac E. Imes

6625 N 56th Avenue
(623) 237-4002

Melvin E. Sine

4932 W. Myrtle
(623) 237-4004

Sunset Vista

7775 W. Orangewood
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6600 W. Missouri
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August 13, 2009

Debra Davenport
Auditor General
2910 N 44th Street, Suite 410
Phoenix, AZ 85018

RE: Response to Glendale Elementary School District #40 2008
Performance Audit

Dear Ms Davenport:

The Glendale Elementary School District respectfully submits our response to the Performance Audit conducted by the Office of the Auditor General for the 2008 fiscal year. We appreciate the formidable task the auditors were charged with in having to evaluate data to make equitable comparisons.

The allocation of available resources to promote student achievement is evidenced in the large gains our students have made over the past two years. In the 2009 fiscal year GESD had thirteen schools increase their performance standing under AZ Learns. Four of these schools improved their standing by two levels – three from underperforming to performing plus and one from performing to highly performing. For the first time in the history of GESD, we had zero underperforming schools, four performing schools, 11 performing plus schools, and two highly performing schools. Under NCLB's Adequate Yearly Progress, we have also made significant improvements. Five schools have been completely removed from any AYP consequences, seven schools improved their AYP status, zero schools declined, and 12 schools made AYP. We believe that purposeful changes to our organizational structure, the leadership provided by District and site administration, the professional development provided to our teachers, the quality of teachers and staff hired, and the support given to our teachers, have contributed to these gains.

We further appreciate the auditor's recognition of the lower per-pupil funding our district receives compared to other districts. GESD has managed a number of programs in order to lower costs. One example is the self-insurance trust for employee benefits. GESD has experienced only an average of a 1% increase in premiums over a three-year period while the market was increasing between 8% – 15% each year. The Glendale Elementary School District will continue to operate in a manner that will further our mission of increased student achievement.

If you have any questions regarding our response, please contact us.

Sincerely,

Sandra Johnson, Ed.D
Superintendent

Recommendations

Administration

1. The district should evaluate whether it can reduce its number of administrative positions to produce cost savings.

The district agrees it should always look for ways to reduce administrative costs and began that process in the spring of 2008.

There are some one-time non-recurring costs amounting to \$388,201 included in the administrative category for the 2007/08 fiscal year contributing to this variance. During the 2007/08 fiscal year GESD was in the process of constructing a classroom wing at the Jack/Mensendick campuses. In order to accommodate the 200 displaced students, the district opened an “annex” school located on the district office site that required one-time administrative costs. In addition, an administrator on assignment was used for managing some special projects. These were eliminated at the close of the 2007/08 fiscal year. The amount per pupil for these one-time administrative costs amounts to \$30.

The comparative districts use counselors and teachers on assignment to provide many of the same services provided by GESD assistant principals. GESD assistant principals perform many support services (i.e., counseling to students, linking families and students to social services and providing student interventions). Surveys conducted of the parents and community showed that many students had left the district due to their parents’ concerns about discipline. Additionally, the Governing Board held a series of workshops with staff to determine ways to improve retention of teachers. At those workshops teachers also expressed concerns that many teachers left due to concerns about discipline. We recognize that having assistant principals in every school adds to administrative costs but believe they are essential to our success and the many improvements we have made that have reduced disciplinary infractions and increased student attendance. GESD’s Governing Board shares the same concern regarding discipline and listed improving discipline and reducing serious infractions requiring student suspensions as Board Goals for 2008-09.

GESD already implemented a plan to further reduce administrative expenses during the 2008/09 fiscal year which included the elimination of a number of positions. In the spring of 2009, GESD implemented another series of cost cutting measures with the largest reductions made to district departments and away from the classroom.

2. The District should discontinue using public monies for staff meals.

GESD agrees with this recommendation at this point in time. It is important to note that, although the district recognizes that all revenue received by the district are

considered “public funds”, the funds used by the district to support these activities were not derived from any taxpayer source. The primary sources for the funds were from donations, revenues from easement agreements and lease of district facilities.

Light meals were provided at committee meetings scheduled through the lunch period and after-school. Committees were comprised of teachers, classified staff, administrators, parents and community members and dealt with evaluating and making recommendations regarding salary and benefit issues, budget issues, performance pay, parental input and participation, and community input and participation.

GESD believes an opinion from the attorney general’s office should be sought to clearly indicate the applicability of non-taxpayer sourced funding. Until that time, we have directed all staff to discontinue food purchases.

Transportation

1. The District should continue identifying ways to further improve the efficiency of its transportation program to produce cost savings.

The District agrees with this recommendation. GESD implemented a reduction of transportation positions and bus driver hours beginning in March, 2009. The fueling tanks have been modified to allow the use of “red dye” fuel in school buses and vehicles not being used on public roads. This will reduce the cost per gallon of fuel based on a lower gas tax.

GESD appreciates the recognition of the efficiencies currently employed in the transportation department.

2. The District should discontinue using buses that do not meet all state Minimum Standards to transport students to and from school.

The District reluctantly agrees with this recommendation. The District will discontinue transporting students on McKinney-Vento routes to and from school in the 15-passenger mini-buses, which meet all side impact and seat specifications of a full-size bus. We will outsource this service to become compliant. However, contracting this service will increase the cost of transporting these students and decrease department efficiency.

Plant Operation and Maintenance

1. The District should evaluate whether it can reduce its number of plant positions to produce cost savings.

The District agrees with this recommendation. The District has already eliminated the practice of using substitutes for short-term absences in the spring of 2009. In addition, it has reduced the number of hours allocated for cleaning facilities.

2. The District should continue identifying ways to further improve the efficiency of its plant operations, including additional ways to lower energy usage, to produce cost savings.

The District agrees with this recommendation. As noted in the audit report, there are a number of cost savings initiatives already underway that are expected to yield savings in this area. Of special concern, however, is the continually increasing cost per kilowatt due to the granting of rate increases to the utility companies. In the 2008/09 fiscal year GESD reduced its kilowatt usage by over 2,000,000kw. However, the overall cost of electricity still increased over the prior year.

Proposition 301 Monies

No recommendations.

Classroom Dollars

1. The District should evaluate costs in the non-instructional areas, particularly administration, to determine if savings can be achieved and if some of these monies can be redirected to the classroom.

The District agrees to always look for ways to be more efficient. In fact, GESD has improved the percentage in the classroom over the past three years, in contrast to the statewide trend of decreasing classroom dollars over this same time frame. Although GESD is lower than the districts chosen for comparison purposes, compared to all districts statewide it ranks much higher according to the auditor general report published in February, 2009. Compared to all districts GESD ranked 90th out of 230 districts. If it is compared only to the 38 districts the auditor general's report categorized as "large" (between 5,000 and 20,000 students), it ranks 20th.

The auditor's report correctly indicates that lower teacher salaries are primarily a result of the relative inexperience of the staff. A comparison of GESD with the comparable districts shows GESD with 51% of its teachers in the first three years of service versus 36% with the comparison districts. In addition, GESD has 15% of its teachers with 15 or more years of experience contrasted with the comparison districts of 18%. The GESD salary schedule compares favorably with the other districts. Therefore, if GESD teachers were to be placed on an average of the other districts' salary schedules, they would be making a salary comparable to their current salary at GESD.

Fiscal Year 2009 SEI Fund expenditures

1. The District should ensure it only places ELL students on Individual Language Learner Plans when it has 20 or fewer ELL students in a three-grade span, as required by the SEI model.

The District agrees with this recommendation.

2. The District should ensure that all Individual Language Learner Plans meet all state requirements, including ensuring that the plans address individual student's needs and specify how each students' needs and specify how each student will receive four hours of English Language development.

The District agrees with this recommendation. In December of 2008, ADE monitored Glendale ESD's ELL program and from the thirty-two items that were included in the ADE observation checklist, only one item was marked as needing improvement. This item was the ILLPs written for the middle school students and the expectation to individualize for each student. Our ILLPs were written in compliance with our interpretation of the training provided by ADE.

After discussing this with ADE, a new understanding was defined for our teachers. Our ILLP must list the student Performance Objectives based on the individual subtests of the AZELLA assessment. GESD's corrective plan was approved by ADE on May 21st.

GESD has continually worked to comply with all the laws and mandates from the state. It has always sought to be pro-active in implementing new directives. Our efforts have received commendations from ADE as stated in its March 6 correspondence, "The monitors would like to commend the district on the work done with principals to increase awareness of the Structured English Immersion (SEI) model components." GESD's Language Acquisition Department has trained administrators in scheduling requirements to ensure future appropriate ILLP decisions. Further, the Language Acquisition Department has established a self-auditing procedure to check the quality and differentiation of ILLPs, alignment of instruction to ILLPs, and actual minutes of instruction.

3. The District should separately account for the incremental portion of ELL costs throughout the fiscal year rather than waiting until year-end to make adjustments.

The District agrees with this recommendation. The District always strives to separately account for all expenditures as they occur. Unfortunately, the rules regarding appropriate coding were unclear. It was determined that the district would adjust the records through a journal entry, which has been completed. The program is now better defined and the accounting for it will follow this recommendation.