School Evaluation Report

George Washington Community High School

2215 West Washington Street
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Indiana
46222

Principal: Deborah Leser

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The current effectiveness of schools in the four key domains:

1. **Governance Structure**
2. **Data and Instruction**
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4. **Socio-emotional and Community Oriented Services**

Information about the school:

George Washington Community High School has an enrolment of 635 students, covering grade 7 through grade 12. The school population comprises 33 percent Hispanic, 19 percent African American, 44 percent White and 4 percent students with two or more races. Twenty one percent of students are designated as English language learners. Twenty one percent are identified as special education students. The attendance rate to date has increased from the previous year and in 2010–2011 is 93.7 percent. Seventy seven percent of students are Title 1 eligible.

The current principal took up her post in January 2010 and has therefore held that position for fourteen months. She has experience in business as well as in educaion, including administration. The principal had limited involvement in writing the current School Improvement Grant (SIG). During her tenure, the principal has appointed over 60 percent of the staff many of whom are bilingual. The intervention model that was selected for the school was the 'Turnaround Model'. The turnaround partner chosen to support the school was 'SchoolWorks' (SW). The turnaround process focused on four major themes; Establishing a new Governance Structure, Use of Data to Inform and Differentiate Instruction, Implementation of Strategies that Create Increased Learning Time and Social-Emotional and Community Oriented Supports for Students.

Academic results in English Language Arts (ELA) and math for the school in 2010 demonstrated a passing rate of 23.5 percent compared to a State passing rate of 66.2 per cent. The school graduation rate was 68.4 percent in comparison with a State graduation rate of 84.5 per cent. Results in ISTEP testing demonstrated a passing rate of 44.7 percent in math and a 34.1 passing rate in ELA. Both these scores are significantly below State and District performance levels. Benchmark data provided by the school suggests that there is an increase in performance across all grades and subjects this academic year.

Part 2: Overview

The areas of the school that have been improved:

- The effective use of new personnel regulations has enabled the District to appoint a new principal and a considerable percentage of other teachers; these staff members have had a positive impact on the developments at the school.
- The principal has made good use of the budget to provide incentives to reward and retain teachers.
- There is an upward trend in student achievement.
- The level of bureaucracy and need for attendance at meetings has been reduced for the school by the District.
- The appointment of a turnaround officer should ensure the school receives critical support and professional guidance.
- Relationships at all levels in the school and between all groups are extremely positive.
- Student behavior is good and teachers have been well supported in developing strategies that have a positive impact on student engagement.
- The relaxed but purposeful culture in the school promotes an environment that is conducive to learning.
- The Professional Learning Communities (PLCS) provide valuable opportunities for staff to discuss and share good practice.
- There is a collegiate approach to school development.
- The Extended Time Learning Center (ETLC) provides opportunities for students to redress identified deficits in their learning.
- The school has a wealth of data which provides timely information about the achievement and progress of each student.
- Classroom observations carried out by members of the administration ensure they have a good understanding of the strengths and development areas of all staff.
- The school provides numerous professional development opportunities.
- The school has extremely good links with community support partners. Parents and students have seamless access to a wide range of support systems.
- Students are kept well informed about credit accumulation needed for graduation.
- The school makes students aware of college requirements and provides valuable information and support to encourage the realization of their aspirations.

The areas of the school that remain to be improved:

- The turnaround partner is not providing sufficient effective guidance, targeted support or depth of intellectual rigor to drive the school forward at an appropriate pace.
- The school lacks a cohesive strategic improvement plan to guide and measure progress against.
- The role and purpose of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) lacks clarity as to its purpose.
- The school lacks an effective leadership team and is therefore too reliant on the principal to inform the future progress of the school.
- There are insufficient experienced and capable personnel in key leadership positions.
- The District expects the school to implement initiatives without evaluating whether the school will benefit from them. These initiatives are generic, not school specific.
- The school lacks sufficient autonomy to make key decisions in selecting and implementing support strategies that they consider will have a positive impact on student achievement and progress.
- The school has not consistently and rigorously evaluated the impact of the initiatives and interventions that have been implemented.
- The principal lacks an effective mentor to provide support and challenge for her.
- The school makes inadequate use of the wealth of data it collects at either whole school or classroom level to make it a useful tool for raising student achievement.
- Teachers do not differentiate their instruction on a regular basis to meet the diverse needs of the student population.
- The work of the data coaches lacks depth and understanding of the potential that this information has to drive up achievement.
- The school does not have a planned program for professional development or systems in place to evaluate the impact of training currently being undertaken.
- Many staff feel that they have insufficient opportunity to embed new skills into their practice because of the wealth of initiatives they have to embrace.
- There is no link between classroom observations and personal professional development plans.
- The system of brief observations is having a negative impact on a significant percentage of teachers and is therefore counterproductive.

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation: The school's overall performance and the extent to which the SIG funding has resulted in significant improvement:

The school has made satisfactory improvement.

The principal and staff have worked hard to improve student learning, but progress against all aspects of the School Improvement Grant (SIG) has been variable. The appointment of new staff has been a positive feature. Many teachers lack experience but they are keen, committed and willing learners. Data demonstrate that student achievement has risen during the year and is displaying an upward trend. Assistance provided by the turnaround partner however lacks rigor and depth. It is presented as a generic method of improvement and not targeted at identified needs specific to the school. This has limited the progress made. The administration works at an operational level and does not have a compelling strategic view about the direction of the school and how to get there. There are insufficient personnel with the capability and relevant experience in key positions to drive school improvement. Therefore the principal has, of necessity, become too involved in operational issues.

The school has a wealth of data relating to student achievement and progress. Analysis of this information is not rigorous enough at whole school and classroom level. Lack of data disaggregation prevents focused targeting of resources to address identified need. Teachers do not use data effectively to modify tasks thus students learning needs are not always fully addressed. Information from scrimmages and benchmark data is used to identify student deficits. This leads to valuable support through the extended day and demonstrates the potential of the information the school has when utilized with purpose.

Professional development opportunities are available across the school and teachers state that they welcome and benefit from the training they receive. There has been no evaluation of the impact of training and little evidence is available to suggest that new skills are being systematically embedded in classroom practice. Teachers have had to deal with numerous new initiatives. They have done this enthusiastically even though at times there is an overwhelming amount for them to take on board. This serves to dissipate the impact of training. Teachers benefit from classroom observations but these are not linked to personal professional development plans specifically targeted at individual need. The mutual support and learning experienced through Professional Learning Committees has lead to a collegiate and corporate approach to the development of the school.

Creative scheduling provides opportunities for identified students to attend the ETLC for additional support to eradicate achievement deficits. However, this is an optional program and is therefore dependent on students wanting to attend even though they are 'encouraged'. Little hard data are available to evaluate the success of this program. However, anecdotal evidence from surveys suggests it is a valuable support for student learning. The extensive provision of Community Services provides exceptional opportunities for the school and wider community. The co-ordination and integration of these services is seamless to the extent that some parents believe that the provision is school led. The support of the counselor and social worker for student development is good. Students feel comfortable in expressing their views in the knowledge that they will receive advice and support. The school has made good progress in preparing students for college and raising their aspirations that this is a desirable and achievable goal. Students are well aware of graduation requirements and what credits they need to accumulate to attain this goal. The holistic support provided by the school and its partners

has an extremely positive impact on current and future opportunities for students. There is an extremely positive culture throughout the school. Relationships are very good at all levels and between all groups. Student behavior is good both in lessons and at transition times. Therefore the climate promotes and provides a rich environment which is conducive to learning.

Governance Structure

The principal, during her short tenure, has made a good start in turning the school around. Progress in some areas is more emphatic than others. However, a predominant culture of development pervades the school. There are areas where growth has been less positive and recommendations made in the SIG not addressed with sufficient rigor. Much of this is due to the quality of support received from the selected school turnaround partner. The appointment of sixty percent of new staff has had a positive effect on the quality of student learning as demonstrated by an increase in their achievement levels. The principal has made good use of the SIG funding to pay teachers additional sums to reward quality and promote teacher retention. This is done by grading remuneration against a rubric which ensures transparency and understanding of the decisions made.

SchoolWorks, the turnaround partner, have adopted a formulaic approach to their development program. This has taken little account of the specific needs particular to this school. Effective support to further develop the principal's leadership skills has been minimal. Consequently, her professional needs have not been fully addressed or her leadership skills developed in a structured way. Action plans developed by SW lack quality and rigor. Success criteria do not measure impact. Evaluation of the effect of the plan has not been undertaken. Therefore, the plans have limited value as a tool for moving the school forward. The principal was asked to select staff to be members of an ILT. Available documentation demonstrates that there was little advice provided as to its purpose. Currently the team is engaged in 'rounds' where they visit other classes and focus on a prescribed observation question. The ILT is keen and enthusiastic, but their activities have little impact on school development or in increasing their own skills. In terms of value for money this is not a cost effective use of teacher time.

The administrators have been allocated specific roles and responsibilities at an operational level. There is little evidence that they have a corporate, strategic view of how the long term development of the school should be achieved. This results in the school engaging in a pragmatic, rather than structured route to success. The SIG is used as a 'plan' but this is a generic bid written for two schools. Therefore activities contained in it are not always pertinent or school specific. The principal works exceptionally hard and is totally committed to the school and the students it serves. However much of her work is at an operational level. The principal does not have personnel in key positions demonstrating strategic leadership with the capacity to drive the school forward at an accelerated pace. Consequently there is a lack of cohesion in direction which has an adverse effect on progress despite the effort expended.

The District has put in place systems to relieve some of the bureaucratic burdens, such as attendance at meetings which detract from the work of the school. This is a good feature but is not always adhered to by some of the District staff. It is important that the school continues to have this independence to enable it to focus on its own priorities. The principal still has limited autonomy to make key decisions that will enhance student progress. Blanket District directives, relating to the implementation of initiatives, result in a level of micro management rather than empowering the principal to make considered decisions based on the evaluation of the diverse needs of the student population. The recently appointment Turnaround Officer has an important function in the development of the school in providing guidance and opportunity for critical reflection.

Relationships at all levels and between all groups are extremely positive. Students state they enjoy coming to school and speak highly of their teachers. They feel secure in the knowledge that support and understanding will be forthcoming if they experience problems. The principal has been extremely successful in developing a supportive and sensitive culture which permeates the building. The school is well ordered, students attentive and the climate positive. This has ensured that the environment is conducive to learning.

Recommendations

- *The school should develop a strategic school improvement plan which reflects the principal's vision and is shared with the wider community.*
- *The plan should:*
  - *Contain the key activities identified to enable progress to occur*
  - *Identify the person(s) who will lead, be responsible and accountable for its success.*
  - *Be time lined with clear staging points against which performance and progress can be evaluated.*
  - *Contain success criteria that reflect the impact the actions have on student performance.*
- *The principal should create a leadership structure that enables her to implement a strategic plan, delegate responsibilities allowing her to become more involved in leadership activities as opposed to those which are operational.*
- *The principal should have a mentor who has the interpersonal skills and qualities to enable them to act as confidant, supporter and critical friend.*
- *Ensure the turnaround partner provides effective support in development areas identified by the school and commensurate with the strategic plan.*
- *Clearly identify the role of the ILT so it has a specific purpose in the development of the school.*
- *The District should evaluate the effectiveness and impact of its appointed 'turnaround partner' in identifying the key improvement needs of the school and the structures they have advised to achieve them.*
- *The District should continue to ensure that the principal has increased autonomy so she is able to make considered decisions that will enhance the progress and achievement of students in the school.*
- *The principal should have the autonomy to accept or reject initiatives provided by the District so she is able to make informed decisions about which will have most impact on student and teacher performance.*

Data and Instruction

The school uses the new instructional calendar and has aligned it to State standards. This ensures coverage of the curriculum in a sequential and structured way. Regular collection of scrimmage and benchmark data is further supplemented by that provided by State testing. The school therefore has sufficient data to monitor student outcomes and progress made. This information is used to identify students who would benefit from attending the extended day sessions. Students with particular needs such as English Language Learners are also provided with focused small group teaching to increase

their language acquisition. One student stated, that she felt she had plenty of opportunity to access additional help and welcomed the attention she was given. The school has therefore been successful in utilizing data to identify student deficits. However, data are not used sufficiently across the school to have maximum impact at whole school and classroom level. The school data coaches do not have an adequate understanding of the benefits the information offers. Therefore they are not in a position to fully support teachers or maximize the potential of this data to drive the school and instruction forward.

Data is not disaggregated or rigorously analyzed to identify the progress of different student groups or cohorts within the school. Therefore the information base is insufficient to confidently target resources effectively at whole school level. Teachers have the results of their scrimmages and benchmarks but do not consistently use this information to plan further activities which would remediate deficits or extend the higher achievers. Many teachers consider that the demands of the curriculum and the required pace of its implementation prevents them from re-teaching to ensure student understanding. Consequently, there is a tendency to deliver a curriculum rather than address student need. This detracts from the rate of individual student progress. Teachers have sufficient data to be aware of what each student knows, understands and can do. However this valuable knowledge base is not used effectively to differentiate activities at classroom level. Concepts being taught are rarely modified to meet the needs of the student population. There was little evidence in classrooms where additional teachers were present to support less able students that they were adapting the task to ensure student understanding. The school recognizes that this is an issue and intends to re-evaluate the system of 'co-teaching' with the intention of increasing their impact on meeting the needs of students experiencing difficulties in learning.

The administration engages in both formal and informal observations so they are well apprised of the strengths and development areas of all staff. This information is not used to provide individual professional development plans focused on identified need. Therefore training is not targeted or person specific which reduces the potential for rapid improvement. Teachers also receive five minute 'drop ins' from supplemental visitors on a regular basis. Many teachers view these visits as counterproductive to the development of their practice. This is primarily because they make summary judgments on compliance issues and are not seen as supportive or helpful.

Teachers meet daily in PLCs to discuss a range of issues including the use of data. These PLCs provide a valuable opportunity for teachers to plan, learn from each other and share their professional expertise. However, the analysis and development of data usage provided through professional development at this time has had insufficient impact. The PLCs have ensured that the school has a corporate approach to school development and staff welcomes this. They have also helped to develop a collegiate spirit in the school which has had a positive effect on developing a strong culture based on mutual support.

Recommendations

- *Clearly define the role of the data coaches and ensure they have the competencies to function effectively.*
- *Ensure that whole school data are disaggregated and analyzed for patterns. Ensure support provided is specifically targeted at redressing imbalances in student performance and extending the learning of higher achieving students.*
- *Analyze available data and use this information to inform the strategic school improvement plan.*

- *Ensure that all teachers are competent in the use of data and use this information to inform their planning.*
- *Provide high quality training relating to differentiated instruction so it is understandable, simple and becomes embedded in teachers' daily practice.*
- *Evaluate the impact of current initiatives, decide which are appropriate as a force for improvement and reject those that are not.*
- *Evaluate and identify the specific instructional needs of each teacher and use this assessment to provide a personal professional development plan for them with attendant support.*
- *Evaluate the role of the supplemental visitors and redirect their abilities as required.*

Increased Learning Time and Professional Development

The school has explored multiple ways of increasing student learning time and has been thoughtful and effective in its approach. It provides extended learning time for both its teachers and students. Prior to the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year teachers participated in paid multi-day summer training events in regard to the implementation of Reading Apprenticeship, Achieve 3000 and Netbooks. These training events were partially effective in preparing teachers for the implementation of the initiatives. However, some teachers feel that they are becoming a 'Jack of all trades and master of none'. The school has made seventeen training days available to teachers throughout the school year for supplemental training, attendance at out of school professional development events, and Saturday Open Lab for targeted training depending upon needs. Teachers regard these training opportunities as beneficial in helping them to better implement the turnaround initiatives. However, there has been no detailed evaluation of their impact on, or relevance to student learning. Neither has the school evaluated the impact of professional development opportunities on teacher skills to ensure the learned activities are embedded in their practice.

Cadre teachers have been used well to release teachers for additional training. They are part of the fulltime staff and therefore are able to plan and implement lessons enabling continuity of learning for students. The principal has been astute in measuring the quality of these teachers. Therefore she was in an informed position to appoint them to permanent positions as appropriate. The school has identified five 'Future Leaders' as per the SIG requirements and their training is ongoing.

The school has extended the learning time for its students by creating a twenty seven weeks ETLC which occurs daily from 2:30 pm until 5:30 p.m. Currently, this program occurs in two sessions each day. This aims to accommodate the needs of students who have busy schedules who otherwise might be unable to attend. Communication about students' needs occurs between the coordinator of the learning center, classroom teachers and tutors who work with the students. The dialogue that takes place is not sufficiently comprehensive to understand all demands. There is need for enhanced communication about the specific demands of students and the monitoring of their progress. At present the only evidence of the impact of this initiative is through qualitative data received by way of student and teacher surveys. The school has not developed systems for determining the impact of the learning center in a more quantifiable way. The program is currently optional and there is a challenge with attendance. The school intends to explore ways of gaining wider participation from students who are especially in need of additional support. This focus on students with deficits in their learning is a positive way of redressing the problems. However, it does exclude all other students who would similarly benefit from additional focused tuition.

The school has implemented the use of Netbooks to extend the learning opportunities for students. Each student has a Netbook that they take home and are able to access assignments, log into other school resources and participate in threaded discussions, moderated by the teacher, when they are away from school. At present this initiative is still in its infancy and very few teachers use the resource to its full potential. The school has yet to evaluate the impact of this resource or provide additional training for teachers to raise their confidence and competence to effectively utilize the Netbooks as a learning extension opportunity for students.

Recommendations

- *Evaluate the impact of the ETLC as it is operated and use the information to restructure as required ensuring maxim benefit for all students.*
- *Identify and target students for the extended day program who are at risk of failing their end of course assessments (ECA), are in credit deficit, are at risk of dropout and not graduating or would benefit from more challenging instruction.*
- *Coordinate the services of the community partners to support students who are unable to attend the extended day program because of jobs or other responsibilities.*
- *Differentiate the extended day program for students who are on track for graduating and who have a high GPA, by exploring and developing a dual credit program or a College Now program*
- *Evaluate the impact of all initiatives (Netbooks, Reading 3000 etc.) to ascertain what is working well and if additional support for their implementation is required.*
- *Ensure there is a balanced approach to professional development which enables new skills to be learned and consolidated in practice before moving on to a new initiative.*

Socio-emotional and Community Oriented Services

The school has been very deliberate in its implementation of social-emotional and community oriented services to support its students. The Director of School and Community Engagement, in collaboration with his team of Community School Coordinator, Parent Liaison, and Extended Day Manager has worked well to effectively and seamlessly integrate the services of well over fifty community partners who are extremely invested in the school and in the success of its students. Consequently, students receive support in almost every imaginable area ranging from counseling services, college tours, tutoring for the American College Test (ACT) and poor relief. However, many parents were unaware of the range of services available to them through the community partners. The school regards this as a testimony to the fact that the community services are so integrated into the operation of the school, that the parents regard those services as coming directly from the school. This also may be an indication of a need for better communication and awareness of school and community provision.

The school social worker and the counselor work in a coordinated manner to support students in navigating their sometimes difficult social realities. The social worker counsels students, makes home visits when needed and also makes referrals to appropriate community oriented services. Students talk highly of the support they receive and welcome the attention they are given. Students clearly understand the graduation requirements in terms of credit accumulation and ECA requirements. The school has made good progress in preparing students for college and providing them with salient information. They know their standing and what they need to accomplish in order to successfully graduate. Students know how to research further information on colleges that may be of interest to them. Similarly students have been supported in setting career goals and have information on available scholarships. Therefore they are aware of the opportunities available to them.

Overall, the work of the school in supporting the socio-emotional needs of students is very effective. This is attributable to the dedication, competence, hard work and passion of the entire school and community engagement department as well as the social workers and counselors.

Recommendations

- *Work on improving communication between the school and the home in regard to the community oriented services that are available to students and parents*
- *Work to increase student voice in the school and their involvement in decision making.*
- *Explore the possibilities of establishing relationships with local colleges and universities to institute a College Now Program to supplement the extended day offerings.*