

Background: At the May 15 Charlottesville City School Board meeting, Superintendent Rosa Atkins presented a report on selecting a vendor to conduct a school efficiency review. With fluctuating federal, state and local revenue streams, the Charlottesville City Schools and other divisions have been faced with difficult budget decisions. Community input during budget discussions often raised questions about the efficient use of division resources. In an era of diminishing resources and increased accountability, it is important that the Charlottesville City Schools, as stewards of public funds, identify and implement an objective and systematic examination of operational structures. Such an evaluation would provide an independent assessment of division processes against objective criteria. The results will provide information to maximize efficiency in resource utilization.

The goals of an efficiency review are to identify what is going on in our school division that represents “best practice,” and to acknowledge and celebrate the things we are doing well. It will also identify opportunities for cost savings—taking a look at each of our departments, evaluating the operational procedures and staffing, and identifying areas where we can save money or make adjustments. Another goal would be to ensure that any non-instructional functions are running efficiently so that as much funding as possible goes to our core mission of instruction.

Board Chair Ned Michie and the Superintendent considered three agencies with expertise in conducting efficiency reviews. The Virginia Department of Planning and Budget (DPB) was selected because of its comprehensive approach, its subsidized cost, and its experience in evaluating Virginia school divisions. This program was implemented in 2003 and codified in the state statute in 2005. The cost of the DPB review is \$30,000, which reflects 25% of the total cost of \$120,000.

In exchange for the state subsidy, DPB requires that a school division implement a minimum of 50% of the recommendations in the final report. If the school division chooses not to implement the recommendations, they will be charged an additional 25% of the cost for a total of \$60,000. Recommendations can include cutting costs or increasing costs to improve efficiency.

The Process: The Virginia Department of Planning and Budget (DPB) has selected MGT of America to conduct the School Efficiency Review of Charlottesville City Public Schools in the coming months. MGT is one of the leading educational consulting firms in the nation, having conducted hundreds of school performance reviews across the country. The firm worked with the Charlottesville community several years ago, as the facilitating agency for the school division’s *Strategic Plan 2006-2011*.

The first phase of the review involves an initial data gathering process that consists of four activities: (1) the collection of divisional data; (2) conducting online surveys of division teachers, school principals, and central office administrators; (3) conducting division self-assessments of the major functional areas; and (4) making an initial visit to conduct diagnostic interviews with selected administrative personnel and School Board members.

Each central office administrator, principal and assistant principal, and teacher will have the opportunity to provide input into the process by completing an online survey. The staff surveys are scheduled to go online **September 8** and staff will have until **September 19, 2008** to complete the survey.

Following these activities, an eight-member team will visit the division and each member will review a specific operational area (*e.g.*, food service, transportation, district organization and management, etc.). MGT consultants also will host a community forum in which school stakeholders are invited to share their positive comments, issues, or concerns with the review team. In addition to the forum, an online forum will be available to allow members of the

community who are unable to attend the community event to express their views and provide input.

MGT will provide the superintendent with an initial draft of the report, which will include findings, conclusions, and recommendations to improve the non-instructional operations efficiency and to highlight best practices in use by the division. Consultants are not evaluating curriculum and instructional programs; they evaluate the *cost* of general and special education programs. Staff will have an opportunity to give feedback on the findings of the report and to verify its accuracy.

After the initial draft process, MGT will then submit a second draft report to the superintendent, DPB staff, and any other parties designated by DPB. The report is based on the outcome of the initial draft report and will include any modifications, elaborations, and corrections arising from previous work.

After a review, the review report becomes the property of the school division, and is released to the public. School divisions certify to DPB that they are implementing report recommendations and implementing budgetary savings (or expenditures) at 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years.

If a school division does *not* implement at least half of the review recommendations or realize at least half of the budgetary savings, DPB sends an invoice for the recovery cost of 25% to be paid between 12 months and 24 months following the release of a final report.

The following dates are currently proposed as the timeline for this review:

- Diagnostic Visit: **September 3-4, 2008**
- Online Survey of Division Staff: **September 8-19, 2008**
- Onsite Review Visit: **October 6-10, 2008**
- Final Report: **January 2009**

Information on school efficiency reviews by the Virginia Department of Planning and Budget is available at <http://dpb.virginia.gov/school/index.cfm> and a list of completed reviews is at <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/efficiencyreview.html>.