



December 9, 2016

Dear Dr. Kelley,

Atlantic Research Partners (Atlantic) was honored to be selected to undertake an Organizational Audit for the Oak Park Elementary School District 97. Based upon conversations with Superintendent Carol Kelley, the two primary principals of the audit, Drs. Jim Hager and Leroy Nunery, understood that the primary purpose of the Organizational Audit was to provide insights, analyses, recommendations, and action plans as the basis for making changes in the way the District planned and operated. We framed our work around best practices and extensive research, with a sharp focus on the differences between “reorganization” and “transformation”: not just moving people, responsibilities or functions, but rather *how Oak Park can become a more effective service organization that delivers on its central mission*. Given budget constraints and the expected retirement of long-tenured staff, we understood that the Organizational Audit would have to have specific, measurable, actionable, and relevant recommendations in order to be useful. We also recognized that the need for the Organizational Audit was complimented by an upcoming move to a new Administration Center that was commissioned prior to Dr. Kelley’s appointment as Superintendent, which we viewed as an opportunity to present the central office to its stakeholders in a new and innovative way.

The ultimate goal of the Audit was to evidence and recommend that, when implemented, District 97 could more effectively deliver improved educational outcomes for all Oak Park students through a more efficient organization. Beyond a study of individuals and their roles, this Organizational Audit and the recommendations are meant to support Dr. Kelley’s academic progress initiatives. When districts undertake reorganizations, they often focus on “moving people” and not changing their approach to the underlying work. **Atlantic** subscribes to the Wallace Foundation’s landmark Central Office Transformation study where it states:

“School district central offices routinely attempt to reform themselves by restructuring formal reporting relationships within central office hierarchies, adding or removing units, or revising their standard operating procedures...While structural changes can be helpful, a transformation strategy is ***fundamentally about remaking what the people in central offices do—their daily work and relationships with schools.***”



Throughout the study, we have emphasized this core concept, and we firmly believe that **the success in implementing changes in the central office must be directly linked to improving the capabilities and capacities of instructional leaders and teachers, at every school.**

We worked to "connect the dots" between the vision of the Superintendent, district goals, and district human resources. The triangulation of vision, goals and resources is the essential framework for the Audit, and our recommendations for action or reassignment are driven by the overarching goal to achieve that desired coherence.

Although we began our work from a "reorganization" perspective, it became quickly evident that it was not Dr. Kelley's intent to just re-position people but to transform the way the district conducted its business. "**Transformation**" is vision-driven, strategic and far-reaching, and it calls for deeper thinking about *why* individuals are doing their assignments, *how* that work affects the district's ability to accomplish its goals, and *when* they are doing their work. Our findings and recommendations reflect the transformation point of view. We acknowledge that reorganizing and transforming a district is not easy work. Too often, districts undergo central office reorganizations with the entrance of new superintendents or after a major calamity. "Transformation" will take time, energy, political capital, and commitment from all stakeholders, including the superintendent, administrators, board members, staff, and community. requires expending political capital.

Based on our initial conversations with individuals within the district, we discovered concerns about the following issues:

- The transfer of knowledge from and between administrators, especially with turnover in certain positions, and certainly as retirements become a reality;
- The need to increase the flow and content of communications across departments and the entire district;
- The desire to evolve to a more collaborative and functional style;
- The capacity of the central office team to adapt to change and/or take on new initiatives;
- Creating coherence around the district's organizational philosophy;
- Integrating various reports and findings into a comprehensive, actionable strategy so that the Superintendent and her team could implement the most important, and highest priorities;
- Creating useful and practical Key Performance Indicators so that district leadership – and all stakeholders – can gauge how the district is performing;
- Redefinition of work responsibilities and deliverables for current administrators;
- Designing of work responsibilities for incoming/new administrators; and,
- Establishing better levels of support for Oak Park schools and school leaders.



Ultimately, the Audit should provide leverage to the Superintendent and district leadership to establish new ground rules, values, norms, and work flows that fit the district’s profile, and to become a central office which becomes more systematic, effective, and efficient in its work of “guarantee[ing] that each student achieves optimal intellectual growth.” (From the District 97 website). The Audit should also provide the Board with a fresh perspective on how to govern and set policies in the future.

As we conducted our reviews, we found that each person interviewed was open and candid about his/her work and responsibilities, and several offered written notes to document their work responsibilities and accountabilities. We are appreciative of the time and dedication of the central office staff, as our primary sources, to inform the contents of this Organizational Audit.

The Atlantic team is most impressed with the vision, courage, and leadership acumen of Dr. Kelley. We also found the Oak Park Central office team to be candid, engaging and responsive on how to transform the district.

We believe this Audit and its recommendations, if implemented with fidelity, can significantly move Oak Park Elementary School District from a “good” district to a “great” district with ALL children reaping the benefits of this important work.

Respectfully,

Dr. Jim Hager, President and CEO
Dr. Leroy Nunery, Senior Strategic Advisor