

Detroit Public Schools Office of Auditor General



Master Schedule Review

Report No. 10-015

June 10, 2010

Purpose

The current financial challenges facing Detroit Public Schools require the District explore all cost-saving and containment opportunities at every level. The assignment of teachers based on enrollment is a process that may offer potential for cost savings that can be realized by ensuring the proper leveling of teacher assignments to student enrollment at all Detroit Public Schools.

The objectives of this review were to verify the conditions and causes for certain noted conditions related to teacher assignments, the utilization of Special Education Teachers and Aides, student capacity and enrollment issues, and irregularities identified on the schools' Master Schedule and Time Roster. Based on the results of this review, the Curriculum department will be in a better position to understand and assess how the selected schools are managing their instructional staff and whether any potential cost savings may be realized through reassignments or class consolidations.

Scope

Review teams lead by the Office of the Auditor General including staff from The Department of State and Federal Programs - were dispatched to the following high schools: *Central, Cody Small Schools, Cody High, Cooley High, Cooley North End, Denby, Henry Ford, M.L. King, Mumford, Osborn Small Schools, Osborn High, Pershing, Southeastern, Southwestern and Western* to verify selected conditions found on the Master Schedule and Time Rosters covering the second semester for School Year 2009-2010. Actual field work was completed on April 26, 2010, with limited follow-up required to ensure the completeness and accuracy of the data gathered.

Process (Approach)

The Office of Academic Affairs performed an analysis of the *Teacher Master Schedules* and *Time Roster* for the selected schools. The Master Schedule by Teacher is used by school officials to manage the day-to-day activities of instructional-based staff. The Time Rosters for each school were obtained from Payroll after they were signed off by the respective principals from the selected schools. Based on the analysis, similar questions and comments were grouped into the following categories for discussion with the school's Principal: Teacher Assignments; Teachers with less than Five Classroom assignments; Low Capacity classrooms; Low Enrollment classrooms; High Capacity classrooms; and differences between the Time Roster and Master Schedule.

Beginning the week of March 8, 2010 the teams initiated surprise visits to the selected schools. The Principal was presented with a copy of the findings and requested to provide a response to each issue. The responses represent the causes

or reasons for the cited conditions. However, there was no independent verification of their responses. The teams also visited individual classrooms to substantiate the classroom assignment and to count students in selected classrooms to compare to the student enrollment.

Master Schedule Does Not Reflect All School Staffing Conditions

The master schedule (Schedule 560) prepared by each school, which is the official school record, is not totally reflective of the conditions that occur on a daily basis at Detroit Public Schools, which limits its effectiveness for monitoring and making management decisions about staffing. As the official school record, the master schedule is designed to help administrators determine staffing allotments, hours of instruction, student distribution and to know teachers' class assignments. It can also assist in helping to locate teachers and students if public safety issues arise.

In its current form, the master schedule reflects more of what is anticipated and what is being offered at a given school more so than what is actually occurring. For example, using enrollment numbers for staffing decisions maybe unavoidable at the onset of a semester; however, after Count Day the actual student attendance not enrollment should drive staffing decisions. Similarly, we found instances where no teachers were assigned to classes based on the master schedule. Further review of the teacher assignment document and inquiry of school principals determined that there were teachers assigned to the classes and the master schedule was incorrect because it had not been updated. According to education administrators we spoke with, the master schedule is an official record and should reflect the current staffing conditions at the school, but often does not.

The master schedules we reviewed were "point in time" documents which provided a snap shot of the staffing conditions at the beginning of the school semester. If the master schedule is being used similar to a budget, it can serve this purpose in its present form. However, to meet its intended objectives, the master schedule should be compared to the actual conditions (Teacher rolls) to make the appropriate staffing changes going forward. If the master schedule is intended to be reflective of actual conditions and staffing needs at the school, then the document has to be constantly modified to reflect the changing conditions impacting staffing that occur at a school on a daily basis.

In addition, according to one school administrator, the official master schedule does not capture all the educational activities that teachers may be assigned to or that meet the educational needs of the students. For example, the master schedules we reviewed did not properly reflect teaching activities performed by special education teachers. Until such time the master schedules are updated to reflect current staffing conditions, the Curriculum Department would have to

compare the official (Sch560) master schedule with teacher assignment documents used on a daily basis at the schools in order to better understand the actual staffing conditions of a given school.

Underutilization of Teachers Results in Higher Cost to the District

Our review found 22 cases at 9 High Schools where it appears teachers are being underutilized resulting in higher salary expenses for the District. Specifically, these teachers were assigned between 1 to 4 classes while the requirement is for teachers to be assigned 5 classes. By contract, teachers can be excused from teaching 1 of the 5 classes if they use the time for selected activities such as working on the yearbook staff, school newspaper or drama classes. The contract allows for additional exemptions based on the discretion of the principal and some have included the Athletic/Eligibility Coordinators and JROTC positions. However, such exemptions account for only one class and each of these teachers have at least 1 less class than 5 required including the exempted class. For example, a teacher at Cooley High School is assigned to teach 3 classes and serves as the Senior Class Sponsor for a total of four classes.

For the 9 schools in question, we believe the practice of assigning less than 5 classes to teachers is occurring primarily for one of two reasons; there were not 5 classes to assign to these teachers or the school is carrying extra teachers to make up the classes not being taught by these teachers. Under both scenarios, it would indicate that there is an excess of teachers at these schools.

Of the 22 teachers in this category, we found 16 teachers were assigned 4 classes, while 4 teachers had only 3 classes for a total of 82 classes. As such, it could be argued that, at a minimum, 5 additional teachers are needed to make up the 28 classes not being taught by these teachers. Based on Curriculum's estimate that the average cost of compensation for DPS teachers is \$108,000, the district is spending an extra \$540,000 for the additional teachers or it could be saving \$432,000 with 4 fewer teachers. Ultimately, this analysis is based on teachers carrying a full load of 5 classes. We recognize that there will and should be exceptions to this requirement, but without specific guidance and monitoring by central administration, the practice is being abused which results in higher salary expenses for the District.

Special Education Teachers Not Documented on Master Schedule

Our audit found 14 conditions at 4 schools (Central, Cody High School, Cooley and Henry Ford High School) where teachers had less than 5 classes. In each case, we found the teachers were special education teachers. In our discussion with Special Education officials, we were told that special education teachers are

managed by caseload versus class load. Specifically, special education teachers are restricted to teaching a maximum of 18 students at any one time, or 23 students for the entire day.

The teachers are often used to team teach, which is a process where they are teamed up with a general education teacher who may have a few special needs students in the class. The special education teacher is there to focus on the special needs students as Resource Support and will, if necessary, remove those students out of the class for more in depth assistance, which is referred to as “Pull Out.” However, currently there is no clear policy on how these teachers should be accounted for nor is there a requirement for them to be reported on the Master Schedule. However, in a memorandum dated March 8, 2010 from the Director of the Office of Specialized Student Services to Region 4 DPS Staff, the director states that *“to accommodate successful program implementation, all Master Schedules must reflect the following support models:”*

Teacher/Student Consultation Resource Support

Direct Instruction / Core Content Course

Tutorial/Pull-out or Push-in Support

Co-Teaching Model

Use of Special Ed Teachers/Aides and Substitutes to Fill Shortages Raises Concern

Our analysis of the audit results indicate that teacher shortages occur for a variety of reasons including retirement, resignation and illness, but how those shortages are managed can result in misuse of positions and may even result in, a violation of grant funding. We found at Central High School, four Special Education Teachers teaching general education classes while at Pershing High School we noted 1 Special Education Aide and 1 Special Education Teacher teaching general education classes. School officials told us that these teachers and aide were team teaching and the general education teacher was no longer available to teach classes because of illness or retirement. However, according to Chris Foley, Director of Operations – Office of Student Support and Specialized Services, aides should not be teaching classes under any circumstance, particularly general education classes. In addition to not being credentialed to teach these classes, it is also a violation of grant funding. This poses the risk that the District may be liable to repay grant funded salaries from general fund revenues.

For the 13 long-term substitutes that were being used for full time assignments to teach general education classes, the questions are whether or not (1) the

substitutes are certified or working on their annual course work plan to become certified and (2) the reasons for using a long term substitute is for an illness position or a one-year child care leave. Southeastern High had 5 long term substitutes in full time assignments, which was the largest contingent of long term substitutes of all the high school in our sample. In 2 of the 13 cases, we were told that the substitutes were building subs, however, according to Curriculum leaders these positions no longer exist.

Ultimately, the issue of filling long-term vacancies for teachers who are on family medical leave or maternity leave is one of compliance. That is, are these positions being filled with certified teachers and whether or not the level of educational service being provided by long-term substitutes is sufficient to meet the requirements for a given discipline and grade level?

Capacity Levels for Some Classes Needs to Be Revised

We found that the capacity level for some classes on master schedules were not correctly set. Specifically, most classes are set at the contractual level of 35 students however; there are several exceptions that require these levels be adjusted to properly reflect the activity occurring in that classroom. For example, gym classes, and ROTC are designed to have more than 35 students, while advanced placement classes would have less than the 35 student capacity. By not setting the capacity at the appropriate level, it can appear that enrollment is over capacity, or in the case of advance placement classes' enrollment is far below the capacity level, which is not the case. This can lead to an erroneous conclusion. We found 6 instances at 3 schools; Central, Denby and Henry Ford where the capacity was not set properly for Physical Education (PE) and Special Education classes being taught. To facilitate Central Administration oversight of compliance with class-size mandates, class room capacities should be properly set on the master schedules to reflect the specific activity occurring in a given classroom.

Work and Pay Locations Not The Same for Some Teachers

In addition to how teachers are being used at DPS High Schools, we identified a number of cases where teachers pay location differs from their work location¹. For example, we identified 57 cases at 8 schools where employees were on a school's payroll, but not working at that school. Three schools; Central, Osborn Upper High and Pershing represented 37, or 65 percent of the 57 cases noted. Principals at these schools told us that employee transfers had not been completed

¹ The Office of the Auditor General is currently auditing this process in a separate audit.

i.e., paperwork not processed by Human Resources or, in a few cases, they had never seen the employees before and therefore were going to investigate.

We met with staff from Human Resources and Payroll to determine the status i.e., work location and pay location for these teachers. In many cases, it was confirmed that an action to transfer the teacher or investigate the matter was pending by Human Resources. Even when these are actions authorized and approved by the District, the delay in processing the paperwork results in teachers being “written in” on a school’s Time Roster when they should be added to the payroll for that school. In at least two of the cases, transfers effective as of August 31, 2009 were not processed until March 1, 2010. Administrators for Human Resources stated that the reconstitution process that occurred at many schools and management’s action to lay off a large number of teachers only to call many of them back significantly contributed to the delay in processing transfer request.

In other cases, we were told that teacher reassignments were authorized, but since no position control number (PCN) was available at the new school, the teacher remained on the payroll of their home school while teaching elsewhere. In a discussion with the budget official who performs this task for special education teachers, he currently has a backlog of 200 budget actions to fund the PCNs that date back to mid-February. There was 2 staff assigned to him who was laid off along with an Executive Director who has since retired.

Our review found that principals appeared to be knowledgeable about teachers assigned to their schools rather on the Time Roster or written in on their Time Roster’s. However, in one case at Southeastern High School, the auditors were investigating a teacher on the Master Schedule who was written in on the Time Roster and found that the teacher was not present in the class and had not been for two weeks. This teacher had been replaced by another teacher who also was not present on the day auditors went to the classroom. According to the students, the replacement teacher only worked one day, which did not appear to be known by the Assistant Principal who accompanied the auditors to the classroom.

All teacher reassignments should be properly authorized by Curriculum/Office of Student Support and Specialized Services, approved by the Budget Department and communicated to Human Resources for execution. In cases where Human Resources or Curriculum are not aware of these reassignments, it may be the result of informal arrangements between two principals. We submitted a list of 57 employees whom were written in on the Time Roster to HR to determine whether they had authorizations for these employees. Forty-two of the 57 employees were instructional-based (i.e., teachers and teacher aides) employees at the schools. Human Resources provided us with documentation for 15 of the 42 teacher re-assignments.

However, no documentation was available for 27 or 64 percent of the 42 instructional-based employees in question. This could indicate that some of the teacher reassignments were unauthorized. According to HR and Budget officials, this situation can and does occur when a principal has excess staffing at one school, but would prefer to loan a teacher out to another school versus giving that teacher or an active PCN up for the remainder of the school year. Although it provides flexibility for the principals in the event that a teacher takes an unscheduled leave, the practice reduces accountability and results in under stating the cost of staffing at the receiving school and over stating the cost of staffing at the school the teacher originated from. Human Resource officials told us that verbal authorizations were given by executive management during the class leveling and reconstitution of schools process last fall that may account for some exceptions. However, even though the authorizations were made verbally, it would seem reasonable that HR would have had some record of these transactions.

In past years, the Payroll Division had a control in place for employees whose work location was different from their pay location. The control would allow an employee in this situation to be paid up to three payrolls. After the third pay period, the employee's check would be held in payroll instead of being sent to the pay location. This helped to limit the amount of time an employee was in this situation. Under such a process, any employee whose work location differed from their pay location would be affected providing it was an authorized re-assignment.

Lack of Guidance Results in Inconsistent Staffing Practices

Overall, without clear guidance defined in policy properly communicated to principals and instructional-based staff, each school may approach teacher staffing differently. It appears that some principals may be building master schedules to reflect the credentials of the teachers they have on staff versus building a master schedule that is driven by curriculum to be taught at that school. This causes inconsistencies and could result in some schools not providing the required curriculum that students need to graduate. The problem is compounded by shortages that may arise due to long term leaves for illnesses or unscheduled retirements and resignations. When this occurs, we believe schools take actions to ensure that class rooms are covered by using existing instructional-based personnel regardless of their teaching credentials. This would explain the number of special education teachers and even teacher aides teaching general education courses.

Another example is how schools approach team teaching and assigning teachers to activities other than teaching are impacted by principal decisions more so than by policy. This leads to inconsistent staffing practices, which may for example violate grant funding or state-established limits for special needs students. In

addition, it can limit Central Administration's ability to monitor staffing and make necessary adjustments in the number of teachers at a given school during the course of a school year.

Faced with limited resources due to declining enrollment, principals are challenged to ensure all classes are properly staffed. On the contrary, we noted occasions when there appear to be more than a sufficient number of teachers on staff, which is evidenced by the fact that several schools had teachers instructing less than 4 classes. However, there currently is no penalty for not complying with curriculum guidance on staffing levels nor is there any benefit to those principal who do comply. Ultimately in order for Curriculum and the Office of Specialized Student Services to manage staffing levels at the schools, policies related to teacher assignments are needed to ensure consistent staffing practices throughout the District.

Reassignments of teachers and counselors should be directed based on requests from the school leadership to the Department of Curriculum for general education teachers and the Office of Student Support and Specialized Services for special education teachers, authorized by budget which will initiate a position control number for the new school assignment and processed by Human Resources in a timely manner. For positions other than teachers that do not impact educational services, the request should go to the appropriate department such as Facilities for custodians, food service workers, engineers, etc. and then submitted to Human Resources. This will ensure that any and all changes at the schools impacting the delivery of services are documented and come to the attention of the appropriate administrators.

Ultimately, for both general and special education teacher resources, the District should have a comprehensive policy that establishes a process for the approval, authorization and execution of teacher reassignments. As part of the process, we believe a listing of all employees that are "written in" at one location while being paid at another location should be prepared by Payroll and submitted to Curriculum, Budget and HR on a bi-weekly or monthly basis during the year.

Better Communication Required To Report Staffing Changes More Timely

Notwithstanding any informal arrangements between school principals to share instructional staff, better communication between schools, Curriculum, Budget, Human Resources (HR) and Payroll is needed to ensure staffing changes that are properly authorized, approved and acted upon are reported in a timely fashion. As mentioned earlier, of the 42 instructional staffing reassignments we identified, only 15 were documented and some personnel actions that were effective August 31, 2009 were not updated in PeopleSoft until our inquiry in May, 2010 or 9 months later. Much of the delay is attributable to the extenuating circumstances

that occurred this last academic year that stretched HR resources and caused delays in its normal processing of staffing changes.

However, even in a more stable environment, it would appear that the communication channels between the schools and central administration are not effective. The process should be clarified and should include specific actions that are required to initiate any staffing change including the reporting of that change. All requests or directives for instructional staffing changes should be documented in Curriculum and if approved forwarded to Budget for a position control number and then forwarded to Human Resources for execution and updated in the PeopleSoft system. Each department should have a set period of time to take action e.g., 48 hours. On a periodic basis a report from Curriculum could be generated to reconcile all requested and executed staffing changes. This will provide for much greater accountability.

Human Resource officials provided the audit team with a copy of a Position Justification Form that must be completed by the schools to fill vacant and new positions and the Request for Personnel Action Form 4034 to execute changes in the PeopleSoft system. However, we could not identify where any procedures were documented to explain to school and central administration officials how the process works.

Conclusion

Ensuring each school has the appropriate level of teacher to student ratio is one of the more challenging efforts facing school districts. Initially at the beginning of the school year, all Detroit Public Schools are staffed based on projected enrollment. After the District has its Fall Count Day, the actual number of students attending a class should be the determining factor upon which leveling decisions are made. Currently, this process of leveling at DPS has extended into the Winter Semester and has become a year-round effort. Although there are certain circumstances such as illnesses and unscheduled retirements that require re-assignments of instructional-based staff, these situations should be manageable using established policy and procedures.

Once the leveling process occurs, any re-assignment of teachers should be in compliance with a District policy that outlines criteria teachers must meet in order to be reassigned to another position.

When teacher reassignments are necessary, the District does not have a clearly communicated policy that sets forth the preferred method to execute the reassignment. For example, we were told that principals should be completing a Request for Personnel Action Form 4034 for special education teacher re-assignments, but it does not appear the form is being consistently used for general

education teacher reassignments. As such, principals rely on a variety of actions to achieve this goal including informal arrangements whereby teachers are loaned out or contacting Human Resources directly for their request.

In the coming academic year, the District will employ a new budget strategy that will result in each school receiving a definitive budget for its operations including staffing. Under this scenario, the re-assignment of instructional-based employees will have to work more efficiently with more timely personnel actions. This is because the schools will be responsible for all staff on their Time Roster. The process of “xx ing” out an employee on the Time Roster will not, in itself, stop the compensation for that employee from coming out of that school’s budget. While this will result in greater efforts by that school’s principal to remove that person from their budget, doing so will require a much tighter and timely process for staff reassignments. This may also provide a disincentive to principals for making informal arrangements to share teachers.

Given the District’s financial challenges that have resulted in staff reductions as well as a significant number of employees that are taking the retirement incentive, Management needs to consider that schools will have other activities related to student education such as senior activities and student information requirements that must be fulfilled. To the extent that additional resources are not provided for these activities, the risk that teachers will be used to fill these responsibilities will continue to exist. On the other hand, if school leaders are intentionally “hiding” teachers for any purpose they are directly contributing to the problem which costs the District thousands of dollars in salary expenses.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

To ensure greater accountability over instructional-based staff at DPS, we recommend that:

Management officials in Curriculum, Office of Specialized Student Services (OSSS), Budget, and HR work together to establish/clarify policy and procedures for reassigning teachers within the DPS school system during the school year that includes notification from the schools, authorization from Curriculum/OSSS, approval from Budget and execution by the Human Resources Department. To ensure accountability the process should include timeframes e.g., 48 hours for each department to perform the required activities.

The Director of Human Resource should inform school-based and central administration staff about the process and procedures required to make a

staffing change, including removing or adding a staff member to their time rosters. This should occur prior to the start of school.

The Director of Curriculum require school leaders to provide actual information to the Curriculum Department on staffing conditions throughout the school year as staffing changes occur.

The Director of Curriculum should maintain a log of instructional-based staffing reassignments including requested and directed changes for long-term or permanent assignments.

MATTER(S) FOR CONSIDERATION

The Director of Curriculum may wish to consider working with the Director of Finance to:

Require the Payroll Division to provide a listing of all employees that are “written in” at one location while being paid at another location and submitted to Curriculum, Budget and HR on a monthly basis during the year.

Management reviewed the draft report and generally agreed with its contents and conclusions and chose not to provide a written response for the final report.

Our audit was performed in accordance with U.S. General Accounting Office Government Auditing Standards and Standards of the Institute of Internal Auditors.

This report is intended solely for management and should not be used for any other purpose. This restriction is not intended to limit the distribution of the report which is a matter of public record.



Odell W. Bailey, CIA
Auditor General

APPENDIX A

MASTER SCHEDULE REVIEW

CONSOLIDATED RESULTS
BY SCHOOL

Master Schedule Review Consolidated Results																						
Condition per Teacher Master Schedule (M.S.)	Cause - Explanation	Central	Cody CT	Cody MCH	Cody PL	Cody IT	Cody H.S.	Cooley	CNE	Denby	Ford	King	Mumf.	Osborn AE	Osborn MATH	Osborn PHS	Osborn UHS	Pershing	SEHS	SWHS	Western	Total
A - Teacher Assignment																						
Vacancy, no teacher assigned to class	Special Education Teachers filling vacancy	4																1				5
Special Ed. Aid teaching regular classes	Teacher is team teaching and agreed to teach																	1				1
Instructional Specialist teaching 1 class	Teacher does professional development and MEAP																	1				1
Long Term Substitute	Long Term Substitute (some referred to as Building Subs.)	3					1			2	1						1		5			13
Blocked classes (multiple classes scheduled)	The school is based on ISA model				3	5										7						15
No 3rd and 4th term class assigned	Special Education Teacher co-teaches with regular classroom teacher							7	1													8
Job Code is 250 Teacher is listed in the Attendance Dept.	This teacher is not teaching a class									1												1
Counselor teaching a regular class	Second Chance Program																			1		1
B - Extended Day Class																						
C - Teacher with Less than 5 Classes																						
1 to 4 classes assigned	Special Education Teacher Team Teaching	2					7	4			1											14
1 to 4 classes assigned	Special Education Teacher with Resource duties	4	3	3					2	8	2	4	7				9	2	2	1	2	49
1 to 4 classes assigned	Teaching classes at another school (DTech/Osborn)													3				3				6
1 to 3 classes assigned	Union Representative, Year-Book, JROTC, Senior Class							2		3	3		1				3	1	2			15
1 to 4 classes assigned	No more room to offer more classes																				4	4
2 classes assigned	Teacher has 4 periods for Management Support												1									1
2 classes assigned	Only 2 classes assigned and 1 Advisory period														2							2
D - Low capacity of students - less than 35 per class																						
Maximum capacity set lower than standard	Gym, ROTC, CTE and other classes									3	5											8
Maximum capacity set lower than standard	Classes undersized to allow DTech students to attend																	12				12
E - Classes - Low Enrollment																						
Enrollment is between 25% and 66%	Upper level elective classes	1					1	3		4	2	4	2				2		7	26	4	56
Enrollment is between 25% and 66%	Special Education classes - Resource and Full inclusion						5				9		17		3			1	2	2	7	46
Enrollment is 109 students for 5 P.E. classes	Special Education ISD		4	4					12									1				21
Enrollment is between 39% and 68% of capacity	Teacher assigned to school for fall overage leveling, now classes are leveling-off																				3	3
Enrollment is below 70%	No reasonable explanation given						2	7					7	2			4					22

