

Transmittal Letter

October 1, 2003

The Honorable Rick Perry, Governor
The Honorable David Dewhurst, Lieutenant Governor
The Honorable Thomas R. Craddick, Speaker of the House
Chief Deputy Commissioner Robert Scott

Fellow Texans:

I am pleased to present this report on the progress of the Webb Consolidated Independent School District (WCISD) in implementing my Texas School Performance Review (TSPR) recommendations.

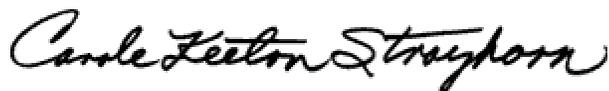
In April 2002, I released the results of my review of the district's operations. This review offered 12 recommendations that collectively could save WCISD taxpayers a net of \$766,136 by 2006-07. The review also noted a number of WCISD's exemplary programs and model services provided by district administrators, teachers, and staff.

In May 2003, we returned to check on how well the district's leadership put these proposals into practice. Over the last year, WCISD has implemented, or is in the process of implementing, 11 of the proposals, or 92 percent. The district has saved a net of \$224,704 to date, and expects those savings to grow to more than \$1.1 million over five years.

This report is available on my Web site at www.window.state.tx.us/tspr/webbpr/.

Thanks for all that you do for Texas.

Sincerely,



Carole Keeton Strayhorn
Texas Comptroller

c: Senate Committee on Education
House Committee on Public Education
The Honorable Judith Zaffirini, Ph.D., State Senator, District 21
The Honorable Ryan Guillen, State Representative, District 31

Progress Report Webb Consolidated Independent School District

October 2003

Introduction

In November 2001, Texas Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn began a review of the Webb Consolidated Independent School District (WCISD) as part of a three-district project that also included Laredo and Mirando City school districts. The three districts are located geographically near each other in Webb County. In April 2002, the Comptroller issued a final report detailing 12 recommendations that could result in net savings of \$766,136 by 2006-07 if fully implemented. During May 2003, Texas School Performance Review (TSPR) staff returned to assess the district's progress in implementing the recommendations.

Since 1991, TSPR has recommended more than 7,600 ways to save taxpayers more than \$780 million over a five-year period in 100 public school districts throughout Texas. TSPR also conducts follow-up reviews of districts that have had at least one year to implement the recommendations. These more than 60 subsequent reviews show that more than 90 percent of TSPR's proposals have been acted upon, saving taxpayers nearly \$135 million, with the full savings estimated to grow in the future.

Improving the Texas School Performance Review

Comptroller Strayhorn, who took office in January 1999, consulted school district officials, parents and teachers from across Texas and carefully examined past reviews and progress reports in an effort to make TSPR more valuable, even vital, to the state's more than 1,000 school districts. With the perspective of having served as a teacher, and later a school board president, the Comptroller has vowed to steer TSPR toward being more accountable to local school districts and the communities they represent.

Comptroller Strayhorn began by establishing new criteria for selecting school districts for future reviews. Priority is given to districts judged poor performing academically or financially and to hands-on reviews that will benefit the greatest number of students.

Recognizing that only about 51 cents of every education dollar is spent on instruction, Comptroller Strayhorn's goal is to drive more of every education dollar directly into the classroom. In addition, no longer are school districts' best practices and exemplary models buried inside individual TSPR reports. Instead, Comptroller Strayhorn has ordered best practices and exemplary programs to be shared quickly and systematically among all the state's school districts and with anyone who requests such information. There is simply no reason for a district that has solved a problem well to keep the solution to itself.

Comptroller Strayhorn has directed TSPR to serve as an active clearinghouse of the best and brightest ideas in Texas public education. Best practices identified in the original review are now included in the Comptroller's best practices database, *A+ Ideas for Managing Schools (AIMS)*, which is accessible on the Web at www.aimsdatabase.org.

Under Comptroller Strayhorn's approach, the TSPR team and consultants work with districts to:

- ensure students and teachers receive the support and resources necessary to succeed;
- identify innovative options to address core management challenges;
- ensure administrative activities are performed efficiently, without duplication and in a manner that spurs education;
- develop strategies to ensure the districts' processes and programs are continuously assessed and improved;
- understand the links among the districts' functional areas and determine ways to provide a seamless system of services;
- challenge any process, procedure, program or policy that impedes instruction and recommend ways to reduce or eliminate obstacles; and
- put goods and services to the "Yellow Pages test" (government should do no job if there is a business in the Yellow Pages that can do that job better and at a lower cost).

Finally, Comptroller Strayhorn has opened her door to Texans who share her optimism about TSPR's potential. Suggestions to improve school reviews are welcome at any time. The Comptroller is a staunch believer in public education and public accountability.

Detailed information can be obtained from TSPR by calling 1-800-531-5441 extension 5-3676, or by visiting the Comptroller's Web site at www.window.state.tx.us.

TSPR in Webb Consolidated Independent School District

Located approximately 35 miles east of Laredo, WCISD covers an attendance area of 800 square miles. The district was created in 1974 when the independent school districts of Bruni, Oilton and Aguilares consolidated.

In 2002-03, three district schools (Oilton Elementary, Bruni Middle School and Bruni High School) served 335 students in pre-Kindergarten through grade 12. Mirando City ISD, which serves students in pre-Kindergarten through grade 8, sends its high school students to WCISD. The district belongs to the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) Regional Education Service Center I (Region 1) in Edinburg.

The Comptroller's Office selected MGT of America, Inc. a consulting firm based in Tallahassee, Florida, and Carter C. Scherff, CPA, a consultant based in Wichita Falls, Texas, to assist with the review. The team interviewed district employees, school board members, parents, business leaders and community members and held a public forum on November 6, 2001, at the high school from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. To obtain additional comments, the review team conducted small focus group sessions with teachers. The Comptroller's office also received letters and phone calls from a wide array of parents, teachers and community members.

To ensure that all stakeholders had an opportunity to comment, TSPR sent surveys to students, parents, teachers, school and central administration and support staff. The review team received 131 responses from seven campus and central administrators and support staff, 12 teachers, 65 parents and 47 students.

The review team also consulted two TEA databases of comparative educational information-the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) and the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS).

WCISD selected peer districts for comparisons based on similarities in student enrollment, student performance and community and student demographics. The districts chosen were Iraan Sheffield, Wink Loving, Sudan, Plains and Sundown.

During its five-month review, TSPR developed 12 recommendations to improve operations and save taxpayers \$912,122 over the next five years. Cumulative net savings from all recommendations (savings minus recommended investments or expenditures) could reach \$766,136 by 2006-07.

WCISD in Profile

In 2002-03, WCISD's enrollment of 335 students consisted of 95.5 percent Hispanic and 4.5 percent Anglo. The district has 59.4 percent of its students identified as economically disadvantaged.

The district's 2002-03 budget was approximately \$9.8 million.

In 2000-01 and 2001-02, WCISD received an overall *Exemplary* rating from TEA. All three of the district's schools were rated as *Exemplary* in 2001-02.

In 2001-02, the percent of WCISD students who passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) for all tests taken was 99.3 percent. The percent of students who passed the math portion of the test was 99.3, while 100 percent passed the reading portion and 100 percent passed the writing portion. In 2002-03, 96 percent of the WCISD grade 11 students met the reading standard of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS); 100 percent met both the mathematics and social studies standard; 82 percent met the science standard; and 79 percent met the standard for all tests taken.

Over the last year, the superintendent reported that few changes have occurred in the district. The district continued to focus on maintaining high student academic performance.

While work continues in the district, both WCISD staff and TSPR team members have a sense of steady progress. The district has implemented seven of the Comptroller's recommendations. The district is working toward completing another four recommendations and has chosen to reject one of the review team's recommendations. **Appendix A** provides the details on the status of each recommendation that TSPR made in its original report.

Webb Consolidated ISD Report Card

Chapter	Total	Complete	In Progress	Not Implemented	Rejected	Percent Complete/ In Progress	Grades
District Management and Operations	7	3	3	0	1	43%/43%	Satisfactory

Educational Service Delivery	2	1	1	0	0	50%/50%	Satisfactory
Financial Management	3	3	0	0	0	100%/0%	Excellent
Overall Grade	12	7	4	0	1	58%/34%	Satisfactory

Excellent = More than 80% complete

Satisfactory = 80% to 100% complete or in progress

Needs Work = Less than 80% complete or in progress

Exemplary Programs and Practices

TSPR identified numerous "best practices" in WCISD. Through commendations in each chapter, the original report highlighted model programs, operations and services provided by WCISD administrators, teachers and staff. The Comptroller encourages other school districts throughout Texas to examine these exemplary programs and services to see if they could be adapted to meet their local needs. TSPR's commendations are listed below, followed by updated information on each topic in italics.

- ***WCISD uses a departmentalized teaching approach to increase student TAAS scores.*** WCISD's TAAS scores rose significantly between 1995-96 and 2000-01, a development the district attributes to its departmental teaching model and its use of up-to-date curriculum. Departmental teaching provides teachers with the opportunity to develop greater expertise in a specific curricular discipline and promotes teaching candidates with genuine enthusiasm for their subject areas. WCISD initiated the departmental teaching model, as part of a district wide effort to improve TAAS scores.

Since the review, WCISD's scores have continued to improve. At the time of the review, only two of the district's three schools were rated Exemplary. In 2001-02, all of WCISD's schools achieved the Exemplary rating. The teaching model used along with continued district's curriculum updates have assisted with this effort.

- ***WCISD aggressively and effectively collects property taxes.*** WCISD collects its own taxes and offers discounts of 3 percent, 2 percent and 1 percent to constituents paying their taxes in October, November and December, respectively. Consequently, WCISD's collection rate is 101%.

WCISD has continued to offer early payment discounts as an incentive to taxpayers. As a result, the district continues to maintain high tax collection rates.

- ***The district provides an attendance and service incentive program for its Food Service employees.*** The district provides a perfect attendance award to Food Service workers and recognizes these employees for their years of service to the district. By recognizing employees for their attendance and tenure, the district encourages responsible employee attendance.

Since the review, WCISD expanded its attendance and service incentive program to include bus drivers. In addition, at the 2002 high school graduation ceremony the district recognized Food Service employees and bus drivers with the perfect attendance awards.

TSPR Key Recommendations

The following are some of the key recommendations that the superintendent said had the greatest impact on district operations. The highlighted recommendations are organized by chapter and by the area of operation as contained in the original report. The comments came from the superintendent during the TSPR team's follow-up visit to the district.

District Management and Operations

Recommendation 2: Develop staffing formulas for all employee categories and reduce staff accordingly. This recommendation encouraged the district to closely review its staffing levels to determine the number of positions needed. Although WCISD has not yet developed staffing formulas, the district uses teacher-to-student ratios and staff-to-student ratios as an internal benchmark to maintain the district's designated staffing level. As a result of reviewing staffing levels, WCISD eliminated five positions - saving nearly \$174,000 annually.

Recommendation 3: Create a community involvement plan and designate an individual to serve as coordinator. Because WCISD recognized that connecting community members, parents and teachers regarding student needs could help student achievement, the board included a community involvement plan in its 2002-03 district goals. A critical part of the plan focuses on having teachers more in touch with parents. The district added a community involvement plan into each campus improvement plan to implement the initiative through the schools.

Educational Service Delivery

Recommendation 8: Collaborate with Mirando City ISD to align the districts' respective curriculum. Teachers from both WCISD and Mirando City ISD (MCISD) began joint curriculum planning in July 2003. An aligned curriculum between the two districts is critical since MCISD students who complete grade 8 transfer to WCISD's high school. Curriculum continuity encourages academic success for all students.

What Still Needs to be Done?

WCISD has made steady progress in implementing TSPR recommendations. The district has implemented seven recommendations and four are in various stages of progress, while one has been rejected. This section addresses the key areas requiring additional attention.

Facilities Planning

Long-range facilities planning ensures school districts always have appropriate space available for students. WCISD rejected Recommendation 4 to develop and implement a comprehensive facilities plan to address construction and renovation needs. The superintendent told the review team that because recent renovations and improvements completed the district's comprehensive \$9 million facilities plan developed in 1994, WCISD does not need a new plan. However, considering the effectiveness of the previous plan, TSPR encourages the district to consider adopting a plan today that can guide the district for the next 10 years.

Staffing Formulas

Personnel costs make up the largest expenditure of most school districts. To adequately manage a district's budget, a district must monitor staffing levels as it relates to student enrollment. Recommendation 2 suggested developing staffing formulas for all employee categories and reducing staff accordingly. Although the WCISD superintendent is monitoring teacher-to-student and staff-to-student ratios and eliminating unnecessary positions, the district should consider establishing definitions for the level and type of staffing needed for each program based on the budget driver ? students. As student enrollment changes in WCISD, personnel decisions are always an integral component of budget development.

WCISD's Ideas for Improving the Texas School Performance Review

The Texas School Performance Review team does not assume that its process for performing school reviews works so well that it cannot be improved. Therefore, as part of the progress report preparation, TSPR

asked the WCISD superintendent and board members to discuss what went right and what went wrong-and then suggest how the process could be improved.

The feedback TSPR has received from other districts led to improvements in the review process. For example, early reports did not include implementation strategies, and districts told TSPR they needed help in getting started. As a result, the reports now include implementation strategies and timelines to complement the recommendations. Districts have told TSPR these blueprints are invaluable to achieving the desired results. It is important for TSPR to continually be mindful of those things that did not work as intended so that the review process can be improved.

The WCISD superintendent welcomed the review team staff and consultants into the district. The superintendent said that he often requests reviews by outside audit teams to ensure the district operates as effectively as possible at all times. However, he was concerned because TSPR made some recommendations that he was not aware were being considered as issues. The superintendent suggested that the review team allow districts to see the recommendations before releasing the published report to the public. While TSPR does not share recommendations during the review, TSPR does conduct a meeting with the district to confirm the report's facts, which are then used as the basis for recommendations. In the future, TSPR will give greater care in writing findings to demonstrate the problem and provide a persuasive description of why a particular district practice should be changed. While TSPR suggests recommendations for improving a situation, the decision to implement the recommendations is solely in the hands of the board and administration. As long as the district agrees that the findings are accurate, the district can choose to approach a given problem in the way recommended by TSPR or in some other way.

Appendix A

Status of Recommendations and Savings

Rec. #	Recommendation	Implementation Status	TSPR's Projected Five-Year Savings (Costs)	WCISD's Actual Savings (Costs) To Date	WCISD's Projected Five-Year Savings (Costs)	Comments
Chapter 1 - District Management and Operations						
1	Implement a controlled retirement incentive plan. p. 17	Complete	\$120,834	\$48,292	\$241,460	WCISD did not implement a retirement incentive plan, but instead adopted a plan where retired district teachers are rehired on a part-time basis to continue specific programs. At the end of 2001-02, the band director and an elementary teacher whose combined salaries and benefits cost the district \$109,017 retired. WCISD rehired these two employees on a part-time basis at a cost of \$60,725, saving \$48,292 annually. As other employees retire, the district will continue to identify programs in which retirees' experience could assist the district at a reduced cost.

2	Develop staffing formulas for all employee categories and reduce staff accordingly. p. 20	In Progress	\$395,527	\$173,741	\$868,705	WCISD has not adopted a defined staffing formula, but monitors staffing levels as enrollment changes primarily based on teacher-to-student ratios and staff-to-student ratios. The district has begun to use ratios as a checkpoint for the staff level the district needs to maintain as it relates to enrollment. After reviewing existing staffing levels at the end of 2001-02, WCISD eliminated five positions. Other staff absorbed the positions' responsibilities, saving \$173,741 annually in salaries and benefits.
3	Create a community involvement plan and designate an individual to serve as coordinator. p. 21	In Progress	\$0	\$0	\$0	The board included a community involvement plan in the district's 2002-03 goals. The district also added the plan to 2002-03 campus improvement plans for the development phase. with full

						implementation in 2003-04. WCISD has not yet designated a community involvement coordinator, but plans to appoint one in 2003-04. WCISD recognized that connecting community members, parents and teachers contributes to student success.
4	Develop and implement a comprehensive facilities plan to address construction and renovation needs. p. 23	Rejected	(\$4,000)	\$0	\$0	WCISD sees no need to implement a facilities plan. The district has completed the comprehensive \$9 million facilities plan developed in 1994. Major construction and renovations from that plan have been completed with the renovation of the Oilton Elementary School Early Childhood Building and the physical plant improvements to date, so the district believes further planning is unnecessary.
5	Evaluate all possible options for decreasing the	Complete	\$227,460	\$0	\$0	WCISD is no longer eligible for Provision II status.

	<p>district's subsidy for food service operations including participation in Provision II of the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program. p. 27</p>					<p>The district studied the possibility of reducing food costs under Provision II. At the time of the review, 64.8 percent of district students were identified as economically disadvantaged. If WCISD's number of economically disadvantaged students had increased by 15 percent, the district would have qualified for Provision II. However, in 2002-03 only 59.4 percent of WCISD students were identified as economically disadvantaged, making the district ineligible for Provision II status. The district will continue to monitor the number of economically disadvantaged students in the future regarding Provision II eligibility.</p>
6	<p>Increase the participation in the breakfast program</p>	<p>In Progress</p>	<p>\$0</p>	<p>\$0</p>	<p>\$0</p>	<p>Breakfast participation has fluctuated from</p>

	to ensure students are receiving affordable and nutritionally balanced meals. p. 29					one year to the next. In 2000-01, breakfast participation reached 42 percent, while in 2001-02 the rate increased to 43 percent. However, in 2002-03 the breakfast participation rate dropped to 41 percent. WCISD is involving students in the breakfast menu planning to encourage more participation.
7	Enter into a formal inter- local transportation agreement with Mirando City ISD. p. 32	Complete	\$29,015	\$3,021	\$15,105	At the end of 2001-02, WCISD entered into an agreement with Mirando City ISD (MCISD) to provide transportation for MCISD students. By charging mileage costs, WCISD will gain \$3,021 annually in revenue.
Totals - Chapter 1			\$768,836	\$225,054	\$1,125,270	
Chapter 2 - Educational Service Delivery						
8	Collaborate with Mirando City ISD to align the districts' respective curriculum. p. 44	In Progress	\$0	\$0	\$0	WCISD and MCISD staff and board members met in May 2003 to discuss aligning the districts' curriculum and also to assist in

						<p>financial planning. Teachers from both districts began joint curriculum planning in July 2003. Because students from both districts attend WCISD's high school, curriculum continuity is important.</p>
9	<p>Review special education expenditures to ensure funds are documented in that category and adjust future budgets if necessary to reflect program enrollment. p. 48</p>	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	<p>The WCISD Business Office and Special Education Department established a procedure to ensure proper coding of special education requisitions into the financial system. Business Office staff has obtained the correct information from principals and the director of Special Education regarding which teachers and aides should be coded as special education. Principals and the director of Special Education have been directed to notify the Business Office of any staff changes</p>

						during the year. WCISD also contacted Jim Hogg County ISD to ensure the district properly and timely bills WCISD for speech therapist services.
	Totals - Chapter 2		\$0	\$0	\$0	

Chapter 3 - Financial Management

10	Use FEISTIER or a similar tool to review and conduct comparative analysis of annual operating expenditures. p. 63	Complete	(\$1,450)	\$0	\$0	Region 1 provides free access to FEISTIER, which the district uses as a financial data resource. In addition to the annual external audit, every three to five years WCISD requests an audit from an outside agency. WCISD will continue that practice to ensure proper analysis of expenditures.
11	Establish a committee of staff and administrators to assess the state employee health insurance plan and help determine the district's course of action. p. 69	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	In 1991, WCISD established an insurance committee consisting of administrators, professional and paraprofessional staff. Each year, the committee meets to determine the district's insurance needs. The district was required to join the

						state health insurance plan in fall 2002. The district provided employees information about their option to choose how the additional state-provided benefit could be spent, either for additional insurance coverage, compensation or a combination of methods.
12	Bond the business manager to protect the district against loss of funds. p. 70	Complete	(\$1,250)	(\$350)	(\$1,750)	In 2002, the district expanded the recommendation by bonding both the business manager and the tax assessor collector since both handle cash.
	Totals - Chapter 3		(\$2,700)	(\$350)	(\$1,750)	
	Total Savings		\$766,136	\$224,704	\$1,123,520	