Executive Summary

June 2011
PREFACE

In response to identified Superintendent targets for 2010-2011 as set forth by the Board of Trustees, Humble ISD contracted with Phi Delta Kappa International Curriculum Management Audit Center to conduct an audit of the quality of the Humble ISD curriculum management process. The audit centered on the alignment of curriculum, assessment and instruction, and included any aspect of operations of the school system that influence student learning.

Humble ISD as a whole continues to make progress in increased student learning and achievement. However, as accountability standards continue to rise, our population continues to grow in numbers and diversity, and financial challenges increase, we believed it necessary and timely to take a reflective look at our policies, procedures and practices surrounding our curriculum management system.

The goal of the curriculum management system audit was not to commend the District for its successes, but rather to identify gaps and/or deficiencies that inhibit our continued progress. Once deficiencies were defined, recommendations were made based on best practice to maximize our human and financial resources, ensuring a sound, valid and operational system of curriculum management that will take the District to the next level of excellence. The audit is our blueprint for purposeful change.

The Executive Summary provides an overview of the purpose, scope of work, data sources, and audit standards by which the District is benchmarked. Also included is the audit report summary, followed by the specific findings and recommendations.
PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF WORK

The Curriculum Audit™ is a process that was developed by Dr. Fenwick W. English and first implemented in 1979 in the Columbus Public Schools, Ohio. The audit is based upon generally-accepted concepts pertaining to effective instruction and curricular design and delivery, some of which have been popularly referred to as the “effective schools research.”

A Curriculum Audit™ is an independent examination of three data sources: documents, interviews, and site visits. These are gathered and triangulated, or corroborated, to reveal the extent to which a school district is meeting its goals and objectives, whether they are internally or externally developed or imposed. A public report is issued as the final phase of the auditing process.

The audit’s scope is centered on curriculum and instruction, and any aspect of operations of a school system that enhances or hinders its design and/or delivery. The audit is an intensive, focused, “postholed” look at how well Humble Independent School District has been able to set valid directions for pupil accomplishment and well-being, concentrate our resources to accomplish those directions, and improve our performance, however contextually defined or measured, over time.

The Curriculum Audit™ does not examine any aspect of school system operations unless it pertains to the design and delivery of curriculum. For example, auditors would not examine the cafeteria function unless students were going hungry and, therefore, were not learning. It would not examine vehicle maintenance charts, unless buses continually broke down and children could not get to school to engage in the learning process. It would not be concerned with custodial matters, unless schools were observed to be unclean and unsafe for children to be taught.

The Curriculum Audit™ centers its focus on the main business of schools: teaching, curriculum, and learning.

Its contingency focus is based upon data gathered during the audit that impinges negatively or positively on its primary focus. These data are reported along with the main findings of the audit.

In some cases, ancillary findings in a Curriculum Audit™ are so interconnected with the capability of a school system to attain its central objectives, that they become major, interactive forces, which, if not addressed, will severely compromise the ability of the school system to be successful with its students.

Curriculum Audits™ have been performed in hundreds of school systems in more than 28 states, the District of Columbia, and several other countries.

DATA SOURCES
A Curriculum Audit™ uses a variety of data sources to determine if each of the three elements of curricular quality control is in place and connected one to the other. The audit process also inquires as to whether pupil learning has improved as the result of effective application of curricular quality control.

The major sources of data for the Humble Independent School District Curriculum Audit™ were:

**Documents**

Documents included written board policies, administrative regulations, curriculum guides, memoranda, budgets, state reports, accreditation documents, and any other source of information that would reveal elements of the written, taught, and tested curricula and linkages among these elements.

**Interviews**

Interviews were conducted by auditors to explain contextual variables that were operating in the school system at the time of the audit. Such contextual variables may shed light on the actions of various persons or parties, reveal interrelationships, and explain existing progress, tension, harmony/disharmony within the school system. Quotations cited in the audit from interviews are used as a source of triangulation and not as summative averages or means. Some persons, because of their position, knowledge, or credibility, may be quoted more than once in the audit, but they are not counted more than once because their inclusion is not part of a quantitative/mathematical expression of interview data.

**Site Visits**

All building sites were toured by the PDK-CMSi audit team. Site visits reveal the actual context in which curriculum is designed and delivered in a school system. Contextual references are important as they indicate discrepancies in documents or unusual working conditions. Auditors attempted to observe briefly all classrooms, gymnasiums, labs, playgrounds, hallways, restrooms, offices, and maintenance areas to properly grasp accurate perceptions of conditions, activities, safety, instructional practices, and operational contexts.

**CURRICULUM AUDIT STANDARDS**

The PDK-CMSi Curriculum Audit™ used five standards against which to compare, verify, and comment upon the Humble Independent School District’s existing curricular management practices. These standards have been extrapolated from an extensive review of management principles and practices and have been applied in all previous Curriculum Audits™.

As a result, the standards reflect an ideal management system, but not an unattainable one. They describe working characteristics that any complex work organization should possess in being responsive and responsible to its clients.

A school system that is using its financial and human resources for the greatest benefit of its students is one that is able to establish clear objectives, examine alternatives, select and implement alternatives, measure results as they are applied
against established objectives, and adjust its efforts so that it achieves a greater share of the objectives over time.

The five standards employed in the PDK-CMSi Curriculum Audit™ in Humble Independent School District were:

1. **Governance and Control:** The school district demonstrates its control of resources, programs, and personnel.

2. **Direction and Clientele Expectations:** The school district has established clear and valid objectives for students.

3. **Connectivity and Consistency:** The school district demonstrates internal consistency and rational equity in its program development and implementation.

4. **Assessment and Feedback:** The school district uses the results from district-designed or adopted assessments to adjust, improve, or terminate ineffective practices or programs.

5. **Productivity and Efficiency:** The school district has improved productivity and efficiency, particularly in the use of resources.

**SUMMARY**

A Curriculum Audit™ is basically an “exception” report. That is, it does not give a summative, overall view of the suitability of a system. Rather, it holds the system up to scrutiny against the predetermined standards of quality, notes relevant findings about the system, and cites discrepancies from audit standards. Recommendations are then provided accordingly to help the district improve its quality in the areas of noted deficiency.

With the direction outlined in the District Improvement Plan, the school district is at a natural point for reviewing, evaluating, and affirming or changing its practices and plans. This juncture is an ideal time to request an external review such as that provided through the Curriculum Management Audit and its analysis protocol. The audit invitation also expresses the commitment to ongoing improvement on behalf of the district and school leaders.

The Humble Independent School District faces numerous challenges, not the least of which is adapting to its growing student population and the attendant issues related to classroom instruction. Most school systems are facing a tightening of revenues, increasing requirements of the *No Child Left Behind* law and upcoming new Federal performance standards, and an increase in the diversity of needs among students. For Humble Independent School District the important element of planning will continue to be an emphasis on data-driven decisions and practices, and the commitment to develop a tightly aligned curriculum to help staff members meet the challenges of the decade.

The intent of this audit report is to identify areas in which the educational program and supporting district operations do not meet audit criteria for effectiveness, and to offer reasonable recommendations related to the identified areas of need. The report contains 14 findings, for which auditors have provided nine comprehensive
recommendations with action steps to help bring the specified conditions to a status of congruence with audit standards.

When reviewing the current status of Humble ISD in relationship to the principles of **Standard One**, which addresses system control and oversight, the auditors found that the current organizational chart does not meet all audit criteria for sound organizational management. Functions are generally grouped effectively, though a few problems were identified in the logical clustering of functions. Scalar relationships are not accurately represented on the organizational chart, with positions at different levels of responsibility and compensation depicted on the same horizontal plane. Incongruity in the chain of command is a result of the discrepancies in the organizational chart. Individual personnel do not comprehend their place within the chain of command.

Board policies are inadequate to provide guidance for curriculum management and to establish quality control of the educational program. Board policies lack sufficient clarity and thoroughness of content to adequately provide clear expectations in such areas of educational program management as design and delivery of the curriculum, professional development, monitoring of curriculum implementation, student assessment, program evaluation, student access to offerings, and other related aspects where policy guidance is needed for systemic direction.

Board policy direction for district and school improvement planning is clear and strong, leaning primarily on state requirements. However, there is little direction for planning in areas of curriculum management, professional development, student assessment and program evaluation, instructional technology, and budget development. The required district and campus improvement planning is happening, but other planning has been minimal to non-existent. Current documents do not meet audit criteria to provide quality direction for ongoing improvement efforts and to cohesively link those efforts across units and functions within the school district. Planning in the district focuses on accomplishment of operational tasks, not on achieving better student results.

The job descriptions presented by the district are extensive in the delineation of tasks to be accomplished by a particular position, but lack clarity and specificity related to the responsibilities and relationships as they pertain to achieving the district’s curricular focus for rigor and excellence. Descriptions lack a clear causal connection between the efforts of personnel and the academic performance of students; rather they focus on the completion of specific operational functions and tasks.

Under the parameters of **Standard Two**, the auditors examined the district’s direction for teaching and learning. Specifically, they looked for systematic curriculum management planning, representation of curricular offerings in high quality written curriculum guides, and clear alignment of the written, taught, and tested curriculum. The auditors found that the Humble Independent School District does not have a comprehensive curriculum management plan to provide direction and expected processes for the design and delivery of the curriculum. A single plan that provides a comprehensive and cohesive approach to curriculum management is not available.

The scope of the written curriculum in the core subject areas of English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies is adequate, but is inadequate in all
other courses. The lack of a written curriculum for all offerings impedes quality control and contributes to inconsistency in the curriculum provided to students across the schools, thereby inhibiting student access and achievement at the desired level. The auditors found that the Humble Independent School District curriculum documents in the core academic subjects do not meet the basic components considered essential to quality curriculum guides. Student equal access to the curriculum is seriously obstructed without quality guides in all subjects and grade levels to provide instructional cohesion and consistency.

Alignment of the written, taught, and tested curriculum is essential to ensure student learning of the essential curriculum. District documents were available to teachers online, but lack the critical characteristics of quality curriculum guidance. The district’s focus on achieving “Exemplary” ratings on the TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) has resulted in a narrow focus on the learnings presented in the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills). As a result, the quality of instruction and student performance has narrowed in the level of rigor presented and lacks the degree of instruction desired by the board. Thus, equal access to a rigorous, district-created curriculum is not available to all students.

During brief visits to all schools and most classrooms, the auditors observed that the predominant instructional practices in the classrooms are inconsistent with the expectations outlined in the teachers’ evaluation form. The auditors observed that the predominant instructional practice was direct, whole-group instruction. Differentiation of instruction, use of best practices in instructional strategies, and effective instructional pedagogy were not observed during auditors’ classroom visits. Instruction is generally limited to lower level cognitive types. Lecture-type, whole-group instruction is the common mode of instructional delivery of the curriculum.

In **Standard Three** analysis, the auditors study both equity and connectivity within the system. The connectivity focuses on professional development as the critical means to connecting organizational intent with worksite delivery, or classroom instruction. When considering equity issues, the auditors are looking for equal opportunities being enhanced by needs-based differentiation in such areas as special programs and services, placement and instructional practices, school-based activity practices, and funding access.

The auditors found that the Humble Independent School District professional development program is inadequate to develop the necessary professional skills for effective design and delivery of the curriculum. There is no district-level planning or coordinating framework that directs the content and methods for professional development, aligning them with district goals. Professional development decisions are predominantly campus based, though there are some examples of emerging district direction for professional development. Planning for professional development content is not consistently based on data and evidence of student needs for mastery of the curriculum objectives as determined by assessment data. The auditors’ review of comparability of student access to courses and services surfaced several concerns about equity and equal opportunity. Subgroups of the student population show varying results in performance on assessments in core academic areas, with African American, economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities, experiencing the least comparable success. Some evidence indicates that the practices in student access and placement have contributed to this phenomenon. An identified imbalance was the placement/enrollment patterns in special programs. Hispanic, African American, and male students are under-
represented in the high school advanced courses. Another imbalance impacting students is the disproportionate racial/ethnic representation among teachers and administrators.

The leadership of the Humble Independent School District has implemented a number of interventions to support student academic achievement needs. The auditors did not find a district-wide process for the selection, development, implementation, and evaluation of these interventions.

In **Standard Four**, the focus is on feedback of various types and how the system used those data. Typically, the information might come from student assessments, program evaluations, surveys, or follow-up studies with former students. Auditors found that the Humble Independent School District lacks a comprehensive student assessment and program evaluation system to guide decision making in the district. As a result, Humble Independent School District does not generate all the information needed to adequately plan for the design and delivery of the curriculum to improve student learning and to achieve the district’s goals.

Most of the district’s assessment efforts are driven by state requirements. Formative assessment efforts have begun in the district but are inconsistently utilized across various schools and do not reflect district-wide efforts. The scope of assessment is adequate in mathematics, language arts, and science, but inadequate in social studies. Many course offerings in non-core subject areas are not included in the district’s student assessment program.

Humble Independent School District students’ performance on state assessments is generally above state and national averages. However, as scores have risen, auditors found that scores for the different campuses reveal varying achievement levels. The achievement gap between White students, Hispanic students, African American students, special education, and economically disadvantaged students are variable. While the gaps are narrowing between White students and minority and economically disadvantaged students in mathematics, reading/English language arts, science, social studies, years to parity calculations in writing indicate that, if today’s rate of improvement were to continue, it would take African American students 14 years to close the gap.

By analyzing the implications of data trends reviewed, the auditors determined that educational changes are needed in order for the Humble Independent School District to reach desired levels of excellence and competitive rankings. How a school district uses data in making important decisions can significantly affect the quality and outcomes of those decisions. Auditors found that the practice of collection, dissemination, and application of data to inform instruction and to plan for improving student performance on local, state, and national tests is ongoing. The district and school improvement plans use data in establishing goals, and have targeted the district’s benchmark assessment and state assessment information to help improve instruction, interventions, and curriculum content.

In analyzing **Standard Five**, the auditors found that the Humble Independent School District had not characteristically employed processes for budget development that meet audit criteria for a curriculum-driven, program-focused budget. Evidence did not indicate that student assessment results had influenced allocation decisions, and no systematic process was in place for evaluation of discrete programs and the use of those results in budget planning. No cost-benefit analysis was systematically
incorporated into the budget planning process to force consideration of various levels of funding for existing programs and services in the budget year being planned. Absence of these systematic steps may impede results over time by not maximizing use of data for results-based decisions.

Overall, the audit team found the motivation and intent of professionals in Humble Independent School District to be emerging into a future-oriented willingness to learn, grow, and meet the changing needs of students. There is evidence of an energetic drive to create the needed changes that will launch strong advances in student achievement. However, some visual indicators of needs for support in teaching to an increasingly diverse student group were noted. Some staff opinions reflected implicit socioeconomic biases and resistance to the changes in the school communities, implying that these are the “excuses” for some students not learning.

Our expertise indicates that these are simply barriers to be overcome, and that they can be overcome with aligned curriculum, effective teaching practices, and system- and community-wide support for improved student achievement. With the professional backgrounds, experience, and commitment of so many district and school leaders and staff members, the auditors firmly believe that the Humble Independent School District will move to higher levels of excellence.

The PDK/CMSi audit team has suggested numerous steps for improving all areas in which the current status precluded meeting audit criteria. While additional actions might be developed by the district administration and staff to implement these recommended changes, most of the recommendations that have been offered have a history of success in similar school systems. The first step is for the Superintendent to develop a work plan for responding to the findings and recommendations. With eventual approval by the Board of Trustees and active implementation by the administration over the next three to five years, this blueprint can bring organizational effectiveness and student achievement to new heights.

**FINDINGS**

A finding within a Curriculum Audit™ is simply a description of the existing state, negative or positive, between an observed and triangulated condition or situation at the time of the PDK-CMSi audit and its comparison with one or more of the five audit standards.

Findings in the negative represent discrepancies below the standard. Findings in the positive reflect meeting or exceeding the standard. As such, audit findings are recorded on nominal and ordinal indices and not ratio or interval scales. As a general rule, audits do not issue commendations, because it is expected that a school district should be meeting every standard as a way of normally doing its business. Commendations are not given for good practice. On occasion, exemplary practices may be cited.

Unlike accreditation methodologies, audits do not have to reach a forced, summative judgment regarding the status of a school district or subunit being analyzed. Audits simply report the discrepancies and formulate recommendations to ameliorate them.

**Standard 1: Governance and Control**
The District demonstrates its control of resources, programs and personnel.

Finding 1.1: Board policies do not direct curriculum design and delivery, provide for adequate curriculum management direction, or ensure effective quality control.

Finding 1.2: System planning is inadequate to direct curriculum management, assessment, staff development, and budgeting to ensure system-wide congruence and drive student achievement.

Finding 1.3: The organizational chart does not meet all audit criteria for sound organizational design. Many job descriptions do not meet audit criteria for current, accurate, and clear specifications of responsibilities and role relationships in the district.

Standard 2: Direction and Clientele Expectations
The District has established clear and valid objectives for students.

Finding 2.1: Humble ISD lacks a documented planning process and a comprehensive management plan that provides coordinated direction of the design, delivery, and evaluation of the curriculum.

Finding 2.2: The scope of the written curriculum is adequate at the elementary level to provide a cohesive framework of the goals and objectives for student learning; the scope of the written curriculum is inadequate at the secondary level.

Finding 2.3: The quality of the district’s adopted written curriculum is inadequate to direct teaching, to promote deep alignment, and to provide a rigorous educational program.

Standard 3: Connectivity and Consistency
The District has demonstrated internal consistency and rational equity in its program development and implementation.

Finding 3.1: Disparity exists in student achievement; student participation in advanced courses is disproportionately represented by ethnicity. Efforts to provide equity among schools have not yet achieved the desired results.

Finding 3.2: Design and delivery of professional development is fragmented and inadequately planned. Professional development lacks systemic monitoring, coordination, and evaluation to support district and program achievement goals.

Standard 4: Assessment and Feedback
The District has used the results from district-designed or adopted assessments to adjust, improve, or terminate ineffective practices and programs.

Finding 4.1: The district lacks comprehensive student assessment and program evaluation planning to guide decisions for improving student achievement.

Finding 4.2: The scope of assessment is inadequate to comprehensively evaluate the taught curriculum.
Finding 4.3: Student achievement in the aggregate is at or above state averages in all subject areas as assessed by TAKS; however, an achievement gap is evident among subgroup populations.

Standard 5: Productivity and Efficiency
The District has improved productivity

Finding 5.1: The district’s budget development and decision making are not fully aligned to district mission, curricular goals, and strategic priorities, nor is there an adequate cost-benefit analysis to assure maximum educational productivity.

Finding 5.2: Policies and procedures for planning, selecting, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating program interventions impede quality control and are insufficient to ensure positive student achievement results.

Finding 5.3: Facilities are well maintained and clean and provide good space for the delivery of instruction; however, dependable access to current technology within the buildings is inconsistent, negatively impacting the utilization of available instructional resources by teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the three streams of data derived from interviews, documents, and site visits, the PDK-CMSi Curriculum Audit™ Team has developed a set of recommendations to address its findings shown under each of the standards of the audit.

In the case of the findings, they have been triangulated, i.e., corroborated with one another. In the case of the recommendations, those put forth in this section are representative of the auditors’ best professional judgments regarding how to address the problems that surfaced in the audit.

The recommendations are presented in the order of their criticality for initiating system-wide improvements. The recommendations also recognize and differentiate between the policy and monitoring responsibilities of the Board of Trustees, and the operational and administrative duties of the Superintendent of Schools.

Recommendation 1: Establish district-wide expectations, direction, and system guidance through updated and new board policies and administrative regulations to support systemic quality control of the educational program and system operations.

Recommendation 2: Revise, adopt, and implement job descriptions and the organizational chart to meet audit criteria, establish clear lines of authority, and improve the clarity of functional relationships.

Recommendation 3: Develop and implement coordinated planning processes that produce congruent district and campus plans, and link the planning for curriculum management, staff development, student assessment, program evaluation, and budget development with those plans.
Recommendation 4: Develop, document, and implement a comprehensive curriculum management plan. Revise curriculum resources/documents to meet audit criteria and provide improved quality control, ensure deep alignment, and support effective delivery. Develop and utilize single source primary curriculum guides, and streamline online documents to guide instruction and assessment. Monitor the delivery of the written curriculum for congruence with district expectations.

Recommendation 5: Implement actions focused on eliminating barriers to equitable access to district college readiness courses and programs to reduce the achievement gap. Examine existing staffing practices and school boundaries to balance student demographics regarding ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

Recommendation 6: Develop, implement, monitor, and assess a comprehensive, centralized professional development plan that provides the necessary competencies for effective delivery of the curriculum, consistent implementation, and plans for follow-up and evaluation of its impact on student learning.

Recommendation 7: Require and formalize comprehensive assessment procedures to provide data for decision making at all levels of the system.

Recommendation 8: Develop and implement procedures for systematic selection, implementation, and evaluation of supplemental and intervention programs at the district and school levels.

Recommendation 9: Develop and implement a budgeting process that aligns district and campus resources to the district mission, curricular goals, and strategic priorities. Include systematic cost-benefit analyses using assessment data to assure that expenditures produce desired results and maximize educational productivity.

The Board of Trustees, Superintendent of Schools and District Administration are scrutinizing the final report – findings and recommendations – and are preparing a response in the context of a multi-year improvement plan that includes action steps, timelines for implementation and progress reporting. Our plan will address the academic growth of each child – those who are academically gifted as well as those who are academically challenged.