LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD

DeSoto Independent School District

Management and Performance Review

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JANUARY 2016

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Legislative Budget Board Staff
McConnell Jones Lanier & Murphy LLP

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January 29, 2016

Dr. David Harris
Superintendent
DeSoto Independent School District

Dear Dr. Harris:

The attached report reviews the management and performance of DeSoto Independent School District's (ISD) educational, financial, and operational functions.

The report's recommendations will help DeSoto ISD improve its overall performance as it provides services to students, staff, and community members. The report also highlights model practices and programs being provided by DeSoto ISD.

Some of the recommendations provided in this report are based on state or federal laws, rules or regulations, and should be promptly addressed. Other recommendations are based on comparisons to state or industry standards, or accepted best practices, and should be reviewed to determine the level of priority, appropriate timeline, and method of implementation.

The Legislative Budget Board engaged McConnell Jones Lanier & Murphy LLP to conduct and produce this review, with LBB staff working in a contract oversight role.

The report is available on the LBB website at http://www.lbb.state.tx.us.

Respectfully submitted,

Ursula Parks
Director
Legislative Budget Board

/rb

cc: Carl Sherman, Jr.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Texas Legislature created the Texas School Performance Review (TSPR) in 1990 to periodically review the effectiveness and efficiency of the budgets and operations of school districts as stated in the Texas Government Code, Section 322.016. The Legislative Budget Board's (LBB) School Performance Review team conducts comprehensive and targeted reviews of school districts' and charter schools' educational, financial, and operational services and programs. The review team produces reports that identify accomplishments, findings, and recommendations based upon the analysis of data and onsite study of each district's operations. A comprehensive review examines 12 functional areas and recommends ways to cut costs, increase revenues, reduce overhead, streamline operations, and improve the delivery of educational, financial, and operational services. School districts are typically selected for management and performance reviews based on a risk analysis of multiple educational and financial indicators.

To gain an understanding of the school district's operations prior to conducting the onsite review, the LBB review team requests data from both the district and multiple state agencies, including the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Department of Agriculture and the Texas School Safety Center. In addition, LBB staff may implement other methods for obtaining feedback on district operations, including surveys of parents, community members and district and campus staff. While onsite in the district, information is gathered through multiple interviews and focus groups with district and campus administrators, staff, and board members.

DeSoto Independent School District (ISD) is located in DeSoto, Texas, along Interstate 35, approximately 13 miles south of Dallas in southern Dallas County. The district is served by Regional Education Service Center X (Region 10) located in Richardson, Texas. The state legislators for the district are Senator Royce West and Representatives Helen Giddings and Yvonne Davis.

The district has 12 instructional campuses, including DeSoto High School, DeSoto Freshman Campus, three middle schools (West, East, and McCowan), and seven elementary schools (Amber Terrace, Cockrell Hill, Frank D. Moates, Northside, Ruby Young, The Meadows, and Woodridge). The district also has a dropout prevention and recovery campus called Where I Now Gain Success (WINGS) and a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) campus. The district is a member in the Dallas County Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP). In school year 2014–15, DeSoto ISD's student enrollment was 9,399 with approximately 77.5 percent of the students identified as African American and 17.8 percent Hispanic. Approximately 65.9 percent of the students were identified as economically disadvantaged (slightly more than the state average of 60.2 percent); 7.1 percent were identified as English Language Learners (ELL) (less than the state average of 17.5 percent); and 36.4 percent of the students were identified as at-risk (less than the state average of 49.9 percent.)

EDUCATIONAL OVERVIEW

DeSoto ISD has a history of consistent academic achievement. In accordance with the state accountability system, the district was rated Met Standard for school years 2012–13 and 2013–14. No state accountability ratings were issued in school year 2011–12. DeSoto ISD was rated Academically Acceptable in school year 2010–11 and Recognized in school year 2009–10. Districtwide, DeSoto ISD and its campuses continued to maintain favorable state accountability ratings until school year 2012–13 when two campuses were rated Improvement Required and in school year 2013–14, four campuses were rated Improvement Required. **Figure 1** shows state accountability ratings for the past five years for the district and the individual campuses in accordance with the previous system (Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, or Academically Unacceptable) and the revised system implemented in school year 2012–13 (Met Standard, Improvement Required, or Not Rated).

DeSoto ISD's academic performance is below regional and state averages in some areas, and above state average in others. **Figure 2** shows various academic measures for DeSoto ISD compared to the average of other school districts in Region 10 and the state. DeSoto ISD's academic performance is lower in four of the six academic measurements.

FIGURE 1
DESOTO ISD STATE ACCOUNTABILITY RATINGS
SCHOOL YEARS 2009–10 TO 2013–14

CAMPUS	2009–10	2010–11	2012–13	2013–14
Districtwide	Recognized	Academically Acceptable	Met Standard	Met Standard
DeSoto High School	Academically Acceptable	Academically Acceptable	Met Standard	Improvement Required
DeSoto Freshman Campus	Recognized	Academically Acceptable	Improvement Required	Met Standard
West Middle School	Recognized	Academically Acceptable	Met Standard	Met Standard
East Middle School	Academically Acceptable	Academically Acceptable	Met Standard	Improvement Required
McCowan Middle School	Recognized	Academically Acceptable	Met Standard	Improvement Required
Amber Terrace Elementary School	Recognized	Recognized	Improvement Required	Improvement Required
Cockrell Hill Elementary School	Academically Acceptable	Exemplary	Met Standard	Met Standard
Frank D. Moates Elementary School	Recognized	Recognized	Met Standard	Met Standard
Northside Elementary School	Exemplary	Recognized	Met Standard	Met Standard
Ruby Young Elementary School	Exemplary	Recognized	Met Standard	Met Standard
The Meadows Elementary School	Recognized	Recognized	Met Standard	Met Standard
Woodridge Elementary School	Exemplary	Recognized	Met Standard	Met Standard

NOTE: No state accountability ratings were issued in school year 2011–12.
SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Academic Accountability Ratings, school years 2009–10 to 2013–14.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

In tax year 2013, DeSoto ISD's preliminary property wealth per student was $218,224. This district's property wealth is less than and thus not subject to the state's primary equalized wealth level (EWL) of $476,500. This value is the property wealth level above which the state recaptures a portion of wealthy school districts' local tax revenue to assist in financing public education in other districts. This primary EWL applies to a district's tax rates up to $1.00 per $100 of valuation. The state's school finance system has a secondary EWL that applies to certain enrichment tax effort above $1.00.

In fiscal year 2014, DeSoto ISD's total actual expenditures were approximately $89.3 million. DeSoto ISD's per pupil actual operating expenditures in fiscal year 2014 was $7,922, compared to the state average of $8,692. In fiscal year 2014, DeSoto ISD spent approximately 52.2 percent of total actual operating expenditure on instruction, compared to the state average of approximately 57.0 percent. The instructional expenditures percentage was calculated using the district's total actual operating expenditures that funded direct instructional activities including: Function 11 (Instruction); Function 12 (Instructional Resources and Media Sources); Function 13 (Curriculum Development and Instructional Staff Development); and Function 31 (Guidance, Counseling, and Evaluation Services.)

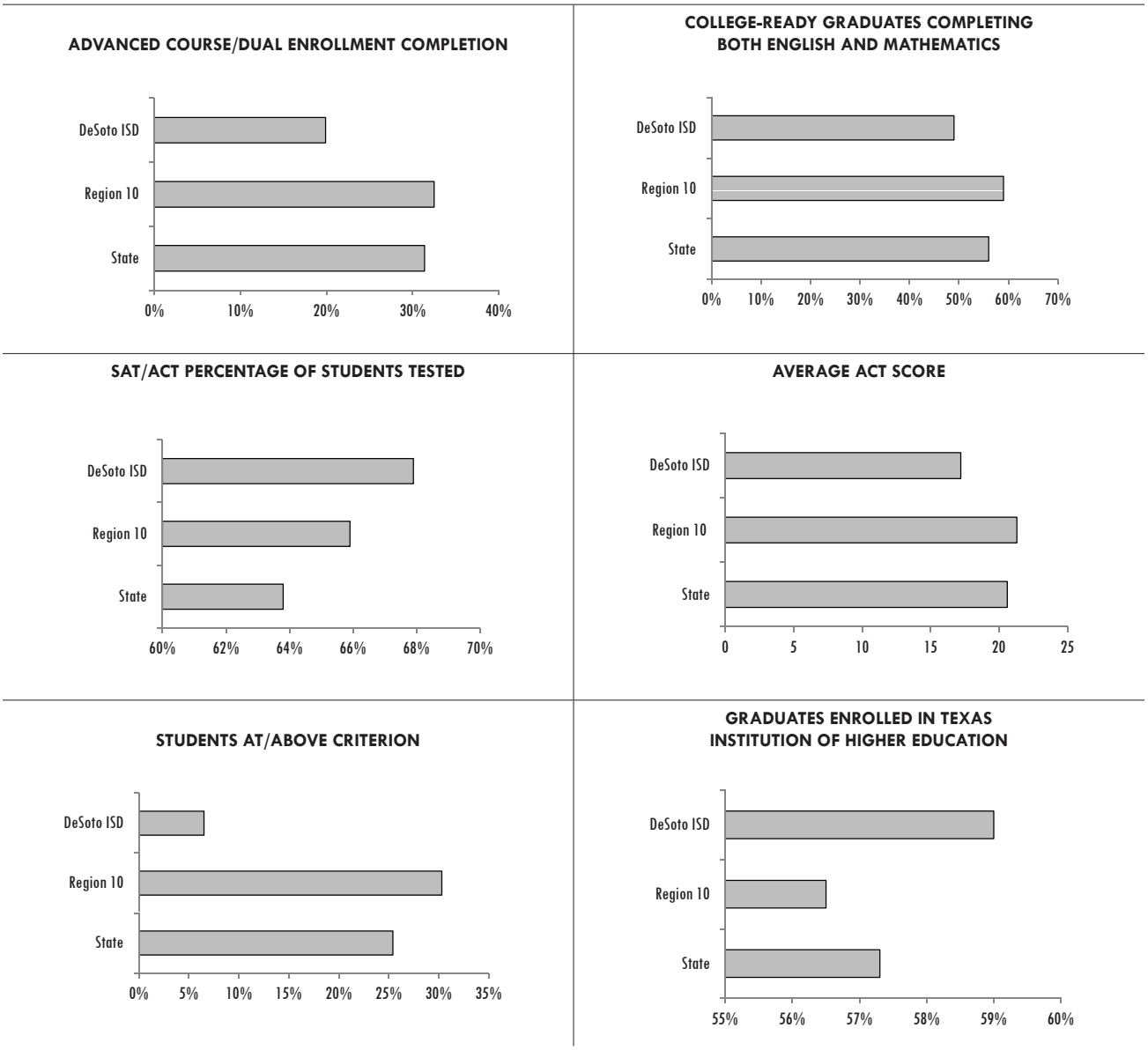
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The LBB's school performance review team identified noteworthy accomplishments during its onsite review based upon the district's best practices.

INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

DeSoto ISD recognized the need and has worked to increase the number and range of educational programs aimed at increasing student engagement, enrollment, and preparation for and success in college, thus helping the district develop into a district of choice.

FIGURE 2
DESOTO ISD STUDENT ACADEMIC MEASURES COMPARED TO REGION 10 AND STATE
SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14



NOTES:
(1) To be considered college-ready, a graduate must have met or exceeded the college-ready criteria on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills exit-level test, or the SAT or ACT test.
(2) Criterion refers to the scores on the SAT and ACT college admissions tests. For college admissions tests, the criterion scores are at least 24 on the ACT (composite) and at least 1110 on the SAT (total).
SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Report, school year 2013–14.

DeSoto ISD chose to have magnet academies in six of its seven elementary schools. In school year 2013–14, DeSoto ISD opened its Collegiate Magnet Academy in collaboration with Cedar Valley College, using hybrid faculty from the college and the district. The academy began with gifted students in the grades nine and 10 and added grade 11 students in school year 2014–15 for a total of 180 students. The district also opened an Early College High School in school year 2014–15 in collaboration with Cedar Valley College for students who are first generation college goers. The district started the iSTEAM3D program in school year 2013–14, an innovative district-grown program that

integrates music, visual arts, drama and dance and is implemented in each of the middle schools for students in grades six through eight. Approximately 200 students applied to the program, and about 150 were selected by lottery. The district also established an International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program starting at the high school level with the goal of implementing it district wide. In school year 2012–13, DeSoto ISD started a two-way, dual-language program in prekindergarten to grade one. About 60.0 percent of the students in the program are native Spanish speakers, and 40.0 percent are native English speakers.

By offering this range of programs at all levels including high-performance options, the administration intends to change the district culture into a college-going culture and attract students who left the district and students from other districts, thereby increasing enrollment.

DROPOUT PREVENTION AND RECOVERY

DeSoto ISD established the Where I Now Gain Success (WINGS) dropout prevention and dropout recovery program that has assisted more than 300 students to graduate from high school. The credit recovery and dropout recovery program started in school year 2010–11 with a $100,000, three-year, dropout recovery grant from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The district continued the program after the grant ended because it is highly effective. The program has strong board and community support. WINGS offers classes to 100 students ages 17 to 26. At the time of the onsite review, the program was at capacity and had a waiting list of 30 students. The instructional program has an individual student focus and uses small-group tutoring. Since the program was established in school year 2010–11, approximately 80 percent of the students enrolled completed the program and graduated. Students are able to graduate in either January or May. The number of graduates more than quadrupled from 21 during the first year of the program to 108 in school year 2013–14. According to the WINGS coordinator, the program has graduated 310 students, and this number is expected to continue to grow.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The LBB's school performance review team identified significant findings and recommendations based upon the analysis of data and onsite review of the district's operations. Some of the recommendations provided in the review are based on state or federal laws, rules or regulations, and should be promptly addressed. Other recommendations are based on comparisons to state or industry standards, or accepted best practices, and should be reviewed by the school district to determine the level of priority, appropriate timeline, and method of implementation.

BOARD ROLES AND OPERATIONS

DeSoto ISD's board has an atmosphere of distrust among board members, resulting in ineffective communication, which compromises the Board of Trustees' ability to openly deliberate issues and effectively govern the district. Furthermore, board members lack adequate training in board member and superintendent roles and responsibilities, and thus frequently get involved in the day-to-day administration and management of the district.

Some board members feel their colleagues do not respect them, some feel their colleagues have personal agendas, and others feel some board members have access to information that not all board members receive. Furthermore, some board members perceive that some members attempt to limit discussion and debate of issues in public, such as out-of-district travel expenditures for the superintendent and his cabinet members. Another board member indicated a lack of trust exists because some members feel the majority of board members protect the superintendent because of perceived personal relationships with the superintendent. Moreover, these members feel the personal relationship between the superintendent and some board members provides access to information that not all board members receive. The board has participated in teambuilding sessions, which is a tool to help to address ineffective communication and distrust among board members. However, DeSoto ISD's board has not conducted a formal board self-evaluation since 2010 in accordance with Board Policy BG (LOCAL), which could provide guidance on how to increase the board's overall effectiveness.

Furthermore, during onsite interviews with some board members, cabinet-level administrators, and principals, the review team learned that a majority of board members frequently get involved in the district's daily administration and management. DeSoto ISD's Board Policy BBF (LOCAL) on ethics states "as a member of the board, I will focus my attention on fulfilling the board's responsibilities for goal-setting, policy-making, and evaluation; and I will avoid personal involvement in the activities the board has delegated to the superintendent." Based on the review team's interviews and focus groups, the majority of board members' actions are not consistent with the board's ethics policy. For example, board members visit the high school and talk with teachers

without notifying the principal that they are in the building, in violation of the Board of Trustees Operating Procedures 2013–14, which requires board members to notify the superintendent and principal before campus visits.

Implementing processes to improve board operations could foster an atmosphere of effective communication and trust among board members, and improve the board's ability to openly deliberate policy and academic, operational, and administrative issues related to critical decisions affecting the district. Additionally, a commitment to conducting a formal, annual self-evaluation and documenting the process in the Board of Trustees Operating Procedures could increase the overall effectiveness of the board and individual members. Furthermore, understanding board roles related to involvement in day-to-day management of the district would demonstrate support for the superintendent's leadership and authority.

Recommendations to assist the district's board with roles and operations include:

- establish a process to annually evaluate the board's overall effectiveness, including the areas of trust, communication, roles and responsibilities, and use the results of this evaluation to plan for board training and team-building activities; and
- amend the local board policy related to board members' ethics to add an enforcement section, and ensure all board members consistently obtain continuing education hours related to their roles and responsibilities.

ORGANIZATIONAL ALIGNMENT

DeSoto ISD has a cumbersome, fragmented, and functionally misaligned organization structure, with similar functions split between reporting relationships divided among multiple cabinet-level administrators and the superintendent.

DeSoto ISD's existing organization structure divides educational, financial, and operational functions among multiple administrators, including the superintendent. Several of these administrators manage one aspect of the district's educational service delivery function. The DeSoto High School principal reports directly to the superintendent, while the other campus administrators, including the DeSoto Freshman Campus and Disciplinary Alternative Education Program administrators report to the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools. The elementary school principals report to the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools; and the middle school principals report to the assistant superintendent for student support services, school improvement, and middle schools. Furthermore, two administrators supervise compatible community involvement functions such as parent engagement, after-school programs, and the DeSoto ISD Education Foundation.

The district's organizational structure results in dual reporting relationships for campus administrators; instructional and noninstructional functions managed by the same administrator; the same function, such as transportation, managed by multiple administrators; and incompatible functions managed by one administrator. For example, elementary school principals indicated that, functionally, they report to the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools; but the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools approves requests for curriculum support services.

Furthermore, student support services are also an educational function that supports the students' noninstructional needs. The assistant superintendent for student support services, school improvement, and middle schools manages some of these functions, such as health services and fine arts; but other administrators oversee some of these functions, such as the school resource officers (SROs) and security, federal programs, technology, and innovative programs. Some of the tasks for safety and security related issues are not efficiently managed by this structure. For example, some SROs report that they receive direction from campus leadership to perform tasks outside of their security duties, which could take their focus off critical security related matters.

The transportation function is organizationally aligned with the assistant superintendent for student support services, school improvement, and middle schools in a contract oversight role. However, the chief financial officer (CFO) does not have a role in the transportation contract oversight, but the CFO tracks and monitors other district contracts. Furthermore, the DeSoto ISD Education Foundation is a community-based organization, and it is not functionally aligned with the executive director of communications position—which reports to the superintendent—that oversees community partnerships.

Additionally, DeSoto ISD position titles at the same level are not consistently aligned. For example, the executive team includes three assistant superintendent positions and two chief positions that report to the superintendent. The

executive director of assessment and accountability and the director of financial services are organizationally aligned, as they report to an executive level administrator, but their position titles are not equivalent. The executive director of assessment and accountability reports directly to the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools and the director of financial services reports directly to the CFO. Both positions assume full responsibility for a function in the district and report to an executive administrator, but their position titles are not reflective of their equal level of authority.

Grouping compatible functions could eliminate dual reporting relationships within the district's organization and foster effective monitoring of the performance of the campuses and departments throughout the district, and contribute to consistent support services to campuses.

Recommendations to assist organizational alignment include:

- restructure the district's organization by consolidating similar functions divided among the executive leadership team, and revise the related staff and functional changes to align district operations;
- make staff and function changes at the executive level, eliminate seven positions, and develop six positions to promote consistency in position titles at each level of leadership;
- reassign organizationally the district's parent engagement, after-school program, and education foundation functions to other departments to ensure appropriate management and oversight;
- centralize transportation functions within the supervision of the DeSoto ISD CFO to ensure contract compliance with interlocal agreements, efficient service delivery, and coordination and maintenance of the district's transportation operations; and
- develop a safety and security coordinator position to provide monitoring and oversight to the district's safety and security function.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

DeSoto ISD lacks a process to fully implement the curriculum management system (CMS) and the instructional and curriculum support staff structure to ensure that students learn with consistent pacing, fidelity, and rigor.

DeSoto ISD uses the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) Resource System (TRS) as the district's CMS. TRS is a comprehensive CMS built on research-based practices in the field and aligned to the State Board of Education-adopted TEKS. DeSoto ISD is in its fifth year of using this CMS. Initially, the district did not make the use of this system mandatory. Each campus had a great degree of autonomy with regard to curriculum implementation, instructional practices and resources. There was no system to monitor use and fidelity of implementation.

Although the current district administration made the use of this system mandatory, the district still faces implementation and monitoring challenges. According to the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools, about 85.0 percent of the teachers use the system. The elementary schools use the CMS the most. The middle schools use the system less than the elementary schools, and the high schools use it the least. The greatest degree of teacher buy-in as it relates to the curriculum is at the elementary-school level. According to the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools, the high school teachers use it with the least consistency. Teachers at the elementary and secondary levels still find using the curriculum management system challenging. Some of the difficulties teachers across all grade levels experience in using the system stems from their insufficient knowledge of the system and a lack of training in using the system. Another area of difficulty teachers experience is associated with the need to develop lesson plans. Although the previous version of the curriculum system had lesson plans, the existing version does not. The lack of lesson plans results in significant difficulties for new teachers. In school year 2013–14, 13.0 percent, or 72, of DeSoto ISD's teachers were new. Another complaint by teachers is that the lessons and assessments do not align. According to elementary school principals, although teachers lack adequate training on the CMS and on teaching with rigorous strategies, teachers appreciate the specificity and depth of the system and consider the performance indicators helpful. However, according to teachers, pacing is a challenge as the system does not allow enough time to cover the readiness standards and to re-teach, an activity that elementary school teachers perform often. Implementing the CMS with fidelity, rigor and pacing are still issues at all three schools. Although the district has increased its monitoring, provides immediate feedback at the end of walkthroughs and holds teachers accountable to a greater extent than previously, consistent implementation has not yet taken hold. The district implemented a system for

walkthroughs to observe and monitor instruction in the classrooms.

Furthermore, the district's instructional support infrastructure is not clearly defined. It does not delineate clearly and operationally how instructional coordinators and curriculum supervisors work together, coordinate their activities and through the synergy of their combined efforts provide added value. The existing infrastructure is insufficient relative to students and teachers' needs for academic and instructional support. Both instructional coordinators and curriculum supervisors have duties across campuses. Both positions identified time management, that is, the ability to meet demand for support, as their greatest challenge. Having each instructional supervisor cover all grade levels—elementary, middle, and high—is challenging and has a negative effect on their accessibility, timely responsiveness, and support quality. The challenge is further complicated since the educational service delivery is administered by multiple district administrators which could hinder coordination efforts across grade levels.

Fully implementing the district's CMS and clearly defining the instructional support infrastructure could provide the district's students with the tools and support to learn with consistent pace, fidelity, and rigor.

Recommendations to assist the district with the curriculum and instruction process include:

- conduct a systematic review of curriculum management system implementation and monitoring districtwide; identify areas at each campus where implementation does not meet criteria such as consistent pacing, fidelity and rigor; and identify best practice strategies to address these areas; and
- strengthen the oversight of the educational service delivery function and develop two executive director positions to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of instructional coordinators and curriculum supervisors to identify and eliminate duplication and ambiguity, enhance coordination and synergy, and determine staffing needs to meet the students' instructional needs.

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

DeSoto ISD lacks a system to develop and support teachers to ensure effective student learning. The district does not provide adequate professional development teacher training to meet the requirements for the state of Texas teacher certification. TEA requires educators to complete a specified number of continuing professional education or professional development (PD) hours every five years to be eligible for renewal of their teacher's certification. DeSoto ISD's PD board policy aligns with the Texas Education Code and states that staff development should be predominantly campus-based, related to achieving performance objectives, and developed and approved by the campus-level committee. However, based on the number of professional development sessions offered from February 2013 to February 2015 that fail to meet teacher needs for certification, the district does not appear to analyze or monitor whether courses offered meet teacher needs. As such, teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the PD offerings and stated that there is a need for more PD in TEKS, content-based PD, and integration of technology with instruction.

Regarding teacher absenteeism, the district lacks an effective system to reduce teacher absenteeism and ensure that the district minimizes its use of substitute teachers in the classroom. Teacher absenteeism has been a concern in DeSoto ISD. The District Improvement Plan (DIP) for school year 2013–14 includes the performance objective of increasing teacher attendance by establishing an incentive plan for teachers. In school year 2013–14, DeSoto ISD teachers had more than 7,000 absences. The largest categories of absences included personal business, sick leave, and school business. As a result, costs of substitute teachers increased from school years 2011–12 to 2013–14, by 46.0 percent.

Furthermore, DeSoto ISD has implemented an ineffective, informal practice to determine staff pay increases that results in inequities across positions. In fall 2014, DeSoto ISD retained the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) to perform a comprehensive pay system review. This study noted that DeSoto ISD teacher pay is about 7.0 percent below market average. Before the 2014 pay system review, DeSoto ISD Human Resources Department staff conducted informal annual salary studies during the budget preparation period to determine salary adjustments for the subsequent year. In addition, the district has had a practice of increasing salaries for high-demand or hard-to-fill positions while not increasing traditional positions at the same percentage. The practice of adjusting pay schedules for some positions based on the informal salary study, establishing new pay grades for some positions, and increasing salaries for high-demand or hard-to-fill positions has contributed to salary inequities.

Establishing a comprehensive system to provide teacher development and support could assist the district with

ensuring that students receive consistent instruction from highly trained and certified teachers.

To assist with teacher development and support the district should:

- develop and implement a professional development plan to include an evaluation component that meets the certification needs of district teachers;
- review the district's existing teacher attendance improvement strategies and address teacher absenteeism through a comprehensive and systemic attendance improvement plan of action; and
- develop a consistent compensation plan, communicate the plan to district staff, and establish business practices to obtain a formal compensation study regularly.

FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT

DeSoto ISD lacks an effective and efficient financial oversight process. For example, the district's cash handling practices risk staff safety and present an opportunity for theft. The district allows its staff, unaccompanied by district or other security officers, to transport cash to the bank in their personal vehicles. The district has not established a secure cash pickup location at a campus or the central office. Allowing district staff to deposit cash at the bank unaccompanied by security represents an internal control weakness and presents a personal risk to these staff. Moreover, DeSoto ISD's cash handling procedures do not include a specific timeframe for bank deposits to occur once staff collects funds. For example, in April 2014, the district experienced theft of more than $12,000 raised by several DeSoto High School student clubs. DeSoto ISD has not addressed the lack of controls regarding safeguarding cash that contributed to this theft.

In addition, DeSoto ISD has established a program that advances short-term loans to staff, but the program lacks an efficient method to recover the funds and it is not certain that the program complies with the law. For the past six school years, DeSoto ISD has offered a voluntary program to its staff that enables them to receive funds that the staff pay back through payroll deductions during the following school year. Those who sign up receive a one-time check for $1,200, and the district requires the staff to repay the loan through payroll deductions. The district has had instances in which staff resigned from the district after receiving the loan. As of March 2015, staff who had resigned owed the district $3,900. Advancing interest-free loans to staff could result in negative consequences for the district such as financial loss if the staff terminates and the perception of inappropriate use of taxpayer dollars among the district's constituents.

Regarding asset management, the district lacks an effective process to manage and safeguard fixed and controllable assets. The district lacks a process to tag, track, and take inventory of fixed and controllable assets such as computer, communications equipment, and cafeteria equipment. The district does not barcode or tag fixed assets as the district receives them or identify the asset's location or custodian, but instead, the district's practice is to send the fixed assets directly to the campus. In addition, DeSoto ISD has not conducted a physical fixed asset inventory since 2004. The lack of an effective fixed asset management system limits the district's ability to capture asset information at the procurement stage and track the cost, useful life, location, movement, custodian, and disposition of each asset. The district risks assets being lost, stolen, or retired without accountability.

The district also lacks effective internal controls of the vendor and payroll master files. The district maintains a vendor database that includes detailed information about each vendor, including the vendor's federal identification number. Although the purchasing specialist in the Purchasing Department is the sole district staff responsible for establishing new vendors in the district's financial system, other staff have access to this system. For example, the accounts payable clerks cannot add vendors to the master file, but they could change and update vendor records. In addition, payroll staff has access that allows them to change staff pay rates. According to district practice, only the district's human resources staff has authority to add staff to the payroll master file. However, staff without official access to modify pay rate and salary information could modify the payroll master file. For example, during a test of the system, the payroll clerk was able to modify her own pay rate without the Human Resources Department receiving the proper system-generated notification.

Furthermore, DeSoto ISD does not maximize its financial system to monitor and track aggregate purchases to ensure compliance with state law. The Texas Education Code, Section 44.031, requires school districts to use one of several competitive purchasing methods when contracting for goods or services valued at $50,000 or more in the aggregate for each 12-month period. The district purchases most of its goods and services via the cooperative purchasing

arrangements. However, being part of a purchasing cooperative may not always guarantee that all entities satisfy procedural procurement requirements in accordance with all applicable local policies, regulations, or state laws including competitive bidding. Before fiscal year 2014, the district used a spreadsheet to track aggregate purchases and to identify purchases requiring bids. The district abandoned this tracking method because it was tedious, manually intensive, and inadequate to achieve the district's purpose. However, the district has not developed another method for tracking the aggregate purchases. Failure to track and use aggregate purchase data exposes the district to violations of state law and poses a risk that the district would not obtain the best value for its goods and services.

Finally, DeSoto ISD's independent, nonprofit education foundation has generated a low percentage of income and has functioned with poor internal controls. Since school year 2010–11, the foundation provided limited scholarships and grants to students and teachers; net profits from fundraisers continue to decrease. Although the foundation board has a clearly defined mission, the board inadequately addresses some key responsibilities related to daily operations. For example, the executive administrative assistant carries out the daily responsibilities of the foundation, but the foundation's board does not require the position to have a professional background or experience needed to perpetuate the mission and goals of the organization. Moreover, the foundation functions with inadequate internal controls for the financial receipt of funds. For example, the foundation's executive administrative assistant logs in all funds received, deposits the funds (sometimes cash donations), and reconciles the foundation's bank accounts.

Implementing effective financial oversight processes could ensure the district's commitment to its fiduciary responsibility to the taxpayers and students in the district.

To assist the financial oversight process, the district should:

- develop minimum timeframes for making bank deposits and require district security to accompany all staff making bank deposits; the district should outline these changes in DeSoto ISD's financial policies and procedures;
- consider eliminating the once-a-year interest-free loan program to staff; the district should also consider collecting outstanding loans from former staff who terminated employment before the district could recover the funds through payroll deduction;
- develop a comprehensive fixed assets management system to identify, record, inventory, track, and dispose of fixed assets;
- implement procedures and controls to ensure that only the Purchasing Department staff have access to add or make changes to the vendor master file, and only Human Resources Department staff have access to add or make changes to the payroll master file;
- implement a process to begin tracking the district's aggregate purchases by extracting the data from the financial system; and
- work with the foundation board to restructure the district's education foundation so that the organization increases revenue and profits and employs the appropriate internal controls to sustain itself as a financially viable and beneficial organization.

TRANSPORTATION CONTRACT MANAGEMENT

DeSoto ISD lacks adequate controls to effectively manage the transportation services interlocal agreement. For example, the assistant superintendent for support services, school improvement, and middle schools is identified as the contact for official notices in the August 1, 2008, interlocal agreement between DeSoto ISD and Dallas County School (DCS). The interlocal agreement expired on July 31, 2014, five months before the onsite review. Although the district provided an unexecuted agreement with a term from August 1, 2012, to July 31, 2015, as of the onsite review, both parties had not signed and finalized the agreement.

DeSoto ISD has not designated a transportation representative to be involved in the accounts payable process for approval of invoices before payment. DeSoto ISD's Financial Services Department pays invoices from DCS for extracurricular transportation services without validation of service performance from the requesting department or campus. Some departments and campuses make check requests to the department for transportation services performed, in lieu of following the district's purchase order process or using DCS's reservation system. Furthermore, the director of purchasing is not involved in the pending renewal of the interlocal agreement with DCS, nor is the director of purchasing involved in an interlocal agreement with the city of DeSoto to provide fuel for district vehicles and police officers for school security. Establishing appropriate controls could eliminate the district's risks of paying for transportation services not performed. These controls could also ensure

appropriate management of the district's allocated transportation budget.

To improve the transportation contract management process, the district should designate specific staff to oversee administration functions for the interlocal agreement with the transportation provider, require all requests for extracurricular transportation services to be processed through the district's purchasing system, and establish a review process for transportation service invoices. The oversight administrative function should designate staff to ensure that DCS and DeSoto ISD adhere to all provisions in the interlocal agreement. This staff should coordinate with the director of purchasing to ensure that the Purchasing Department has a copy of the agreement, renewal dates, and information regarding vendor performance.

The subsequent chapters in this report contain a summary of the district's accomplishments, findings, and numbered recommendations. Detailed explanations for accomplishments and recommendations follow the summary and include fiscal impacts.

The following figure summarizes the fiscal impact of all 60 recommendations in the performance review. It shows a breakdown of how much the implementation of the recommendations will cost or save during the following five years. It also shows the combined total spent or saved.

FISCAL IMPACT

	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	TOTAL 5-YEAR (COSTS) OR SAVINGS	ONE-TIME (COSTS) OR SAVINGS
Gross Savings	$118,899	$118,899	$118,899	$118,899	$118,899	$594,495	$0
Gross Costs	($291,931)	($291,431)	($291,431)	($291,931)	($308,931)	($1,475,655)	($16,800)
Total	**($173,032)**	**($172,532)**	**($172,532)**	**($173,032)**	**($190,032)**	**($881,160)**	**($16,800)**

CHAPTER 1. DISTRICT ORGANIZATION, LEADERSHIP, AND MANAGEMENT

An independent school district's governance structure, staff management, and planning process provide the foundation for effective and efficient education of students. Each school district in Texas is governed by an elected seven-member board of trustees (board). The board focuses on decision-making, planning, and providing resources for achieving goals. The board sets goals, objectives, and policies and approves plans and funding necessary for school district operations. The superintendent is responsible for implementing policy, managing district operations, recommending staffing levels, and allocating the resources to implement district priorities. The board and superintendent collaborate as a leadership team to meet district stakeholder needs.

DeSoto Independent School District (ISD) is located in DeSoto, Texas, along Interstate 35, approximately 13 miles south of Dallas in southern Dallas County. According to the 2010 census, the city of DeSoto had a population of 49,047, an increase of 30.3 percent since the 2000 census. According to the DeSoto Economic Development Corporation's Community Profile, DeSoto is part of the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex, which consists of 12 counties and over 200 cities and towns, including Dallas and Fort Worth. Since the 2010 census, the DeSoto Economic Development Corporation reports DeSoto's total population at 51,483 residents in 2014, representing a 5 percent increase. DeSoto ISD is the largest employer in DeSoto, representing approximately 20.7 percent of the employees employed by the top 20 employers in DeSoto in 2014.

DeSoto ISD covers 23 square miles and serves students in DeSoto, Glenn Heights, and Ovilla at 12 campuses. A review of the Texas Education Agency's Academic Excellence Indicator (AEIS) reports and Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR) indicates the student population increased 5.4 percent in the previous three years, from 8,921 in school year 2011–12 to 9,399 in school year 2013–14.

According to the district's 2013–14 TAPR, approximately 77.5 percent of DeSoto ISD students were African American, 17.8 percent were Hispanic, 2.9 percent were White, 0.3 percent were Asian, 0.2 percent were American Indian, and 1.2 percent were of two or more races. In addition, 65.9 percent of students were economically disadvantaged (the state average was 60.2 percent), and 36.4 percent were identified as at-risk (the state average was 49.9 percent). The median household income was $60,945 in 2014.

BOARD GOVERNANCE

Figure 1–1 shows the district's seven-member governing Board of Trustees, elected at-large to serve staggered three-year terms. According to Board Policy BBB (LOCAL) Places 6 and 7 expired in 2015, Places 1 and 2 expire in 2016, and Places 3, 4, and 5 expire in 2017.

The board meets twice monthly, on the second and fourth Monday, at 6:30 pm in DeSoto ISD's Dalton L. James Administration Board Room, located at 200 East Belt Line Road. The board also holds special meetings and workshops, as necessary.

The superintendent and board secretary work with the president and vice president of the board to coordinate the agenda for each meeting and determine the items to include. Typically, cabinet members submit regular items to include on the agenda to the superintendent. The superintendent's cabinet is the district's executive leadership team, and includes: the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance and elementary schools; the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and high schools; the assistant superintendent for student support services, school improvement, and middle schools; the chief financial officer; the executive director of assessment and accountability; the chief human resources officer; and the executive director of communications. Any board member may request the board president to place specific items on the agenda. The public is welcome to attend all meetings and may address the board on issues unrelated to individual personnel concerns during the Citizens' Participation section of the agenda. The district posts Citizens' Participation Procedures year round on the front and back of the Dalton L. James Administration Building, and on its website.

The board secretary, superintendent, and cabinet members begin preparing for the regular board meeting 14 days prior to the meeting. The board secretary gathers information related to regular agenda items from the previous year and notifies cabinet members by e-mail to have drafts of their agenda items for the initial discussion at the weekly cabinet meeting on the Wednesday after the regular board meeting.

FIGURE 1–1
DESOTO ISD BOARD OF TRUSTEES
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

NAME	TITLE	PLACE AND TERM EXPIRATION	YEARS OF SERVICE	OCCUPATION
Warren C. Seay, Jr. (1)	President	Place 6 - May 2015	6	Attorney
Van Stripling	Vice President	Place 2 - May 2016	5	Bank Examiner
Carl Sherman, Jr. (1)	Secretary	Place 1 - May 2016	2	Commercial Property Manager
Karen Daniel (1)	Member	Place 3 - May 2017	1	Retired Educator
Jerry Hall	Member	Place 4 - May 2017	1	Real Estate Broker
Aubrey Hooper (1)	Member	Place 5 - May 2017	1	JJAEP Principal (2)
Donald Gant	Member	Place 7 - May 2015	12	Regional Manager – Fast Food Chain

NOTES:
(1) Since the time of the review, Warren C. Seay, Jr. resigned and Sandre Moncriffe was sworn in on May 26. Carl Sherman is Board President, Aubrey Hooper is Vice President, and Karen Daniel is Secretary.
(2) Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program.
SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, April 2015.

Cabinet members draft regular agenda items based on items presented the previous year. After reviewing and discussing the draft agenda items, cabinet members have seven days to be ready for final agenda review in the cabinet meeting on the Wednesday before the regular meeting. The superintendent then meets with the cabinet to finalize the agenda items and the board secretary creates a draft of the agenda for the board meeting, including all action items, to create the board packet using the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) BoardBook application. The superintendent reviews the agenda with the president and vice president of the board. Once the president and vice president of the board approve the agenda, the board secretary e-mails the agenda to all board members between 12:00 pm and 5:00 pm on the Thursday before the regular board meeting the following Monday. On the Friday before the regular board meeting, the board secretary releases the agenda to the public and posts the notice of the regular board meeting online and at the administration building. The board secretary also gives formal notice of the regular board meeting to the appropriate media outlets.

DeSoto ISD's board agenda is comprehensive and includes a consent agenda for routine actions requiring board approval. The agenda also allocates time for employee recognitions, citizens' participation (comments), and updates and reports from the superintendent. The board's executive session is at the end of the agenda and the board secretary gives the board president a folder containing a form titled "The Certified Agenda of Closed/Executive Session," along with a 9 x 6 envelope labeled "Executive Session Topic and Date" when the board convenes the executive session. The president of the board completes the certified agenda in executive session, seals the certified agenda in the envelope, and files the sealed envelope with the agenda.

The board secretary prepares the official minutes of open sessions using the TASB BoardBook tool, and submits the minutes of the previous meeting to board members, along with the board agenda, via e-mail. The board president and other board members, review all meetings official minutes for accuracy and completeness before the board adopts and approves them. The board does not record minutes of executive sessions.

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

According to the superintendent's employment contract, the superintendent is the chief executive of the district and shall faithfully perform the duties of the superintendent of schools as prescribed in the job description, district policy, and board directives. The contract further states the superintendent shall:

- recommend employment of all professional employees, subject to the board's approval, and employ all other personnel consistent with the board's policies;
- direct, assign, reassign, and evaluate all employees of the district, consistent with board policies and federal and state law;

- organize, reorganize, and arrange the staff of the district;
- develop and establish administrative regulations, rules and procedures necessary to efficiently and effectively operate the district, consistent with the board's lawful directives, policies, and state and federal law;
- accept all resignations of employees of the district, consistent with the board's policies, except the superintendent's resignation, which is subject to acceptance by the board; and
- perform the duties of the Superintendent of Schools for the district with reasonable care diligence, skill, and expertise in a thorough, prompt, and efficient manner.

The board appointed Dr. David Harris the superintendent of DeSoto ISD in March 2012, and he formally assumed his duties as superintendent in April 2012. Before the board appointed him superintendent, Dr. Harris served as the assistant superintendent for secondary education in Beaumont ISD. During his career in public education, Dr. Harris served as a classroom teacher and coach in LaVega, Bryan, and Fort Bend ISDs. He also served as an assistant principal and principal in Beaumont ISD.

The superintendent's initial contract term ran through June 2016. The superintendent's contract includes provisions for the board to evaluate and assess his performance annually during the term of the contract. Accordingly, the board conducted the superintendent's annual evaluation in its March 2015 regular meeting and voted to extend his contract for an additional three years through June 2019.

The superintendent meets with his cabinet every Wednesday morning at 7:30 am. Cabinet meetings are interactive and typically include extensive discussions of pertinent issues affecting administration and operation of the district. Further, the superintendent issues directives to the cabinet members, cabinet members provide status reports for their respective functional areas, and the team plans for the district's twice-monthly board meetings. **Figure 1–2** shows the district's organization for school year 2014–15.

DeSoto ISD's leadership team, responsible for school administration, includes the elementary, middle, and high school principals. DeSoto High School's principal and the district's athletic director report directly to the superintendent. The principals of the Freshman Campus and District Alternative Education Program report to the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction and high schools. The elementary school principals report to the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools. The middle school principals report to the assistant superintendent for student support services, school improvement, and middle schools.

Each school has a Campus Educational Improvement Committee (CEIC), consisting of district and community stakeholders, including teachers, parents, school administrators, community leaders, and business leaders. The CEICs play an important role in school administration through campus-based decision-making. Each committee works collaboratively with principals and other school administrators to develop campus improvement plans and provide financial and volunteer resources to improve and sustain student performance throughout the district. Schools must have adequate resources and flexibility to develop programs tailored to meet the unique needs of the students they serve.

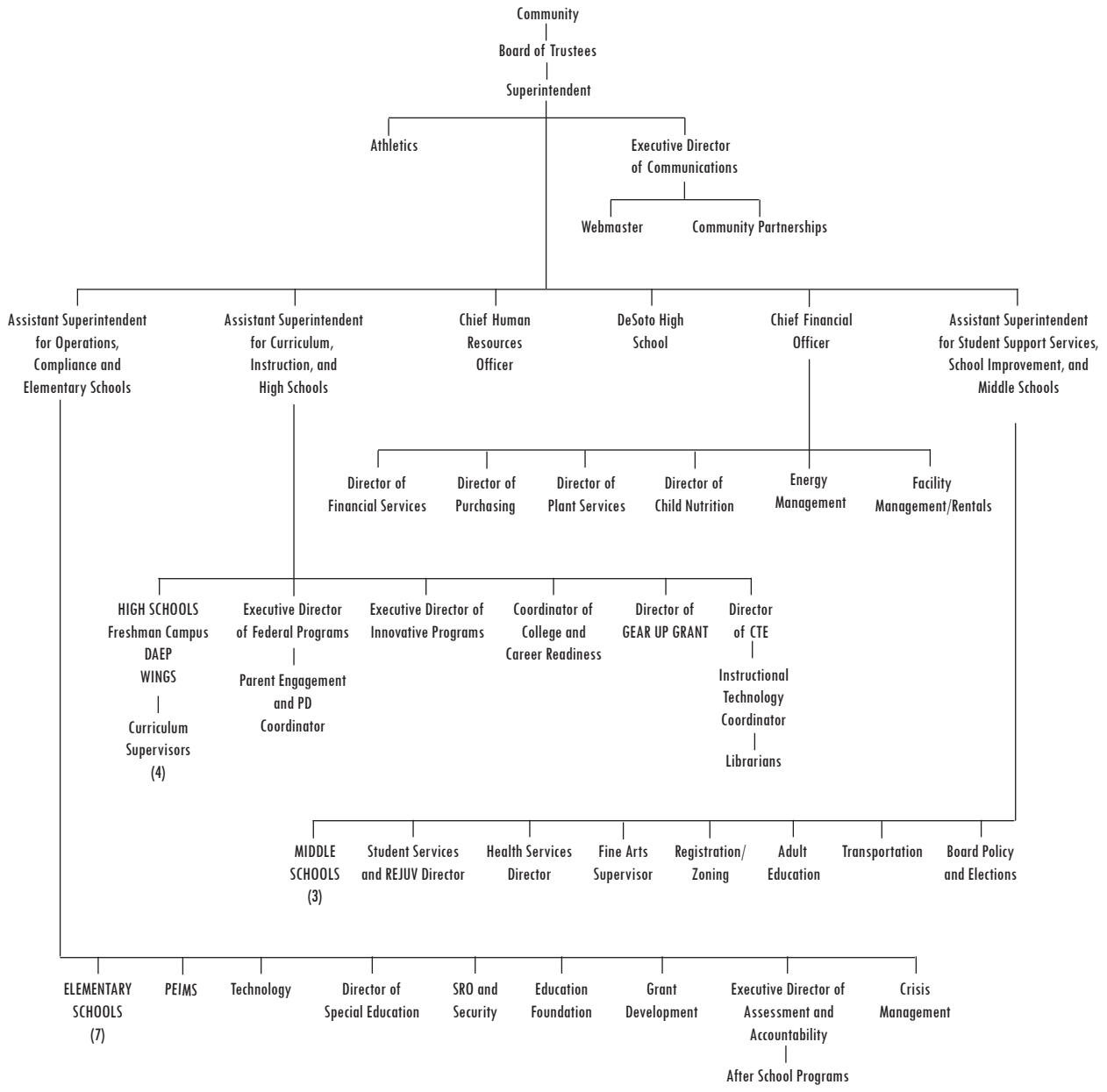
ACCOMPLISHMENT

- DeSoto ISD has an effective process to control legal costs and acquire legal services, which reduced the district's annual legal fees by 39 percent from fiscal years 2010 to 2014.

FINDINGS

- DeSoto ISD's board members lack adequate training in board member and superintendent roles and responsibilities and thus frequently get involved in the day-to-day administration and management of the district.
- DeSoto ISD's board has an atmosphere of distrust among board members, resulting in ineffective communication, which compromises the board's ability to openly deliberate issues and effectively govern the district.
- DeSoto ISD lacks an effective process to ensure all board members receive board agenda packets in a sufficient amount of time prior to meetings, so that members have time to review the packet and obtain answers to clarifying questions, and all members receive the same information.
- DeSoto ISD has a cumbersome, fragmented, and functionally misaligned organization structure, with similar functions split between reporting relationships divided among multiple cabinet-level administrators and the superintendent.

FIGURE 1–2
DESOTO ISD ORGANIZATION
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15



SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board, March 2015; DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

- DeSoto ISD's leadership lacks a process to conduct a comprehensive, fully integrated, stakeholder-driven, long-term strategic planning process, which links all of the district's areas of operation to the budget.
- DeSoto ISD's superintendent does not enforce the cabinet meeting guidelines to ensure orderly and productive meetings and limit distractions from cabinet members.

- DeSoto ISD's executive leadership team lacks a consistent method to deliver key messages, initiatives, and directives from cabinet meetings to campus administrators, teachers, and central office staff throughout the district, and does not effectively include principals in campus level decisions.
- DeSoto ISD lacks a consistent, structured process to prepare and empower principals to be effective operational leaders of their campus.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 1: Amend the local board policy related to board members' ethics to add an enforcement section, and ensure all board members consistently obtain continuing education hours related to their roles and responsibilities.**
- **Recommendation 2: Establish a process to annually evaluate the board's overall effectiveness, including the areas of trust and communication, and use the results of this evaluation to plan for board training and team-building activities.**
- **Recommendation 3: Revise the existing board meeting structure to include a work session for the board before the regular board meeting and revise the board meeting schedule to one monthly meeting.**
- **Recommendation 4: Restructure the district's organization by consolidating similar functions divided among the executive leadership team, and revise the related staff and functional changes to align district operations.**
- **Recommendation 5: Implement a comprehensive, fully integrated strategic planning process using elements of the traditional and stakeholder-driven strategic planning processes and link the plan to the budgeting process.**
- **Recommendation 6: Implement a formal structure and process to support the Cabinet Guiding Principles for more effective cabinet meetings to include conducting an anonymous survey of the cabinet members to obtain feedback about the effectiveness of cabinet meetings.**
- **Recommendation 7: Establish a formal internal communications plan to effectively deliver the district's internal communications to employees throughout the district, and incorporate steps to include key stakeholders, such as principals, in the early planning stages of district initiatives related to campus-level changes.**
- **Recommendation 8: Establish a formal, ongoing training program for new and tenured principals.**

DETAILED ACCOMPLISHMENT

CONTROL OF LEGAL FEES

DeSoto ISD has an effective process to control legal costs and acquire legal services, which reduced the district's annual legal fees by 39 percent from fiscal years 2010 to 2014.

Under the superintendent's leadership, since April 2012, the board president and superintendent instituted a process requiring all board members and cabinet-level administrators to obtain approval and authorization before contacting the district's outside legal counsel regarding potential legal matters. For example, individual board members cannot contact the district's law firm in any circumstance. The president is the only board member authorized to communicate with the district's law firm on behalf of the board. Accordingly, individual board members must present issues that may require consulting with outside counsel to the board president, who will determine if a given issue merits legal counsel. If individual board members contact the district's law firm directly, the partner who received the communication must "redirect" the board member to speak to the board president to obtain authorization to work on the matter for the board.

The superintendent requires all cabinet members, including the chief human resources officer, chief financial officer, and assistant superintendents to obtain his approval before contacting outside counsel on matters involving special education, employee grievances, contracts, bond financing, and potential litigation. **Figure 1–3** shows a comparison of DeSoto ISD's legal fees to its peer districts' legal fees from fiscal years 2010 to 2014. **Figure 1–3** also shows DeSoto ISD controlled its legal fees over the past five years, with average annual legal fees totaling $79,088, compared to an average of $146,911 annual legal fees incurred by its peers, which is 85.8 percent less than the peer district average. Further, only Temple ISD incurred fewer legal fees than DeSoto ISD over the past five years.

FIGURE 1–3
DESOTO ISD LEGAL FEES COMPARED TO PEER DISTRICTS
FISCAL YEARS 2010 TO 2014

FISCAL YEAR	CEDAR HILL ISD	SHARYLAND ISD	TEMPLE ISD	PEER DISTRICT AVERAGE	DESOTO ISD
2010	$122,446	$112,712	$55,750	$96,969	**$85,435**
2011	$301,518	$78,237	$159,988	$179,914	**$106,452**
2012	$251,682	$138,175	$42,404	$144,087	**$101,448**
2013	$245,674	$98,849	$35,845	$126,789	**$49,986**
2014	$324,952	$206,017	$29,423	$186,797	**$52,121**
5-Year Annual Average	**$249,254**	**$126,798**	**$64,682**	**$146,911**	**$79,088**

SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board, Peer District Survey, February 2015; DeSoto ISD, Financial Services Department, February 2015.

Implementing a process requiring the board president and superintendent to approve and authorize all expenditures for legal fees, with the board president having the sole authority to engage outside counsel on board matters, is an effective measure to control potentially spiraling legal costs. School districts throughout Texas and the United States tend to grapple with the high cost of legal services, and DeSoto ISD's approval process limits the number of administrators and board members who could initiate legal services, thereby decreasing the district's legal costs.

DETAILED FINDINGS

BOARD MEMBER ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND TRAINING (REC. 1)

DeSoto ISD's board members lack adequate training in board member and superintendent roles and responsibilities, and thus frequently get involved in the day-to-day administration and management of the district.

During the onsite interviews with five of the seven board members, cabinet-level administrators, and principals, the review team learned that a majority of board members frequently get involved in the district's daily administration and management. Despite the majority of board members reciting the "textbook" definition of their understanding of a board member's role and responsibilities, interviewees cited a number of instances in which board members' behavior ran counter to the textbook definition. **Figure 1–4** shows examples of board member involvement in the administration and management of district operations.

Instances of board member interference are so frequent that one member of the cabinet remarked "board members are 'on the ground' rather than in the eagle's nest, because they are members of an 'activist board' that likes to be involved in school and administrative matters." Another cabinet member told the review team "all except one board member interfere in day-to-day operations." Still another cabinet member

FIGURE 1–4
DESOTO ISD EXAMPLES OF BOARD MEMBER INVOLVEMENT
FEBRUARY 2015

- One board member attended a cabinet meeting to provide his views on the district's salary survey and communicate to the superintendent and cabinet concerns the survey must address for him to support the results of the survey.
- One board member requested the district to establish the Black Male Fine Arts Academy and routinely attends administrative meetings held at the academy.
- Board members visit the high school and talk with teachers without notifying the principal that they are in the building, in violation of the Board of Trustees Operating Procedures 2013–14, which requires board members to notify the superintendent and principal before campus visits [Page 4, Section VII, 3].
- Board members have attended disciplinary committee meetings, which are administrative in nature and result in recommendations to the superintendent for specific disciplinary action.
- Board members interfered with a cabinet-level administrator's office move in the Dalton L. James Administration Building after the administrator called the board member and complained about the new office location.
- One board member admitted taking information related to specific issues provided to him by community members directly to principals without first going to the superintendent. However, this board member indicated he "does not tell them how to resolve the issue."
- During the elementary and middle school principals' focus group, one principal shared that a board member introduced potential candidates for job openings at the campus and the principal felt pressured to hire the candidates.

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Staff Interviews and Focus Groups, February 2015.

stated, "board members are so 'hands-on' it is sometimes difficult to make administrative decisions."

The board president, at the urging of other board members, assigned individual board members to campuses throughout the district and district level committees. One board member the review team interviewed admitted to "pushing for the president to assign each board member to a specific campus for visibility, because principals and teachers wanted to know board members existed and cared." There were no guidelines established as to how the board members were to interact with the assigned campus. The decision to assign board members to campuses and district-level committees appears to have contributed to multiple instances of board members crossing the line of demarcation between policy-making and involvement in the day-to-day management of the district. Generally, board members who actively intrude in day-to-day operations and management of a school system do so because they do not have the proper training to perform their governance role, or the board does not have an appropriate self-policing policy to discourage such behavior. According to DeSoto ISD's Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) Board Member Continuing Education Report, not all board members have the same number of training hours in board roles and responsibilities and superintendent/board roles and responsibilities. Without adequate training, members could have the inclination to "overreach" into the management and operations of the district. Further, upon review of the existing board policies and the Board of Trustees Operating Procedures, recently updated at its April 13, 2015 regular meeting, and based on interviews with board members, the board does not have a self-policing policy. **Figure 1–5** shows each board members' continuing education hours for attending topics related to board roles and responsibilities, board/superintendent roles and responsibilities, and team building.

Figure 1–5 shows that three board members (members B, E, and G) attended 83 percent of TASB's training related to roles and responsibilities. The remaining four board members attended only 17 percent of training related to roles and responsibilities, with two of them (members A and C) not attending any training related to roles and responsibilities.

DeSoto ISD's Board Policy BBF (LOCAL) on ethics states that "as a member of the board, I will focus my attention on

FIGURE 1–5
DESOTO ISD BOARD OF TRUSTEES CONTINUING EDUCATION HOURS
JUNE 2001 TO JANUARY 2015

CONTINUING EDUCATION TOPIC	MEMBER A	MEMBER B	MEMBER C	MEMBER D	MEMBER E	MEMBER F	MEMBER G	TOTAL
Board Roles & Responsibilities	0	5	0	3	6	3	12	**29**
Board/Superintendent Roles & Responsibilities	0	8	0	0	3	0	0	**11**
Total Hours in Roles & Responsibilities by Board Member	**0**	**13**	**0**	**3**	**9**	**3**	**12**	**40**
Percentage of Total Hours in Roles & Responsibilities by Board Member	**0.0%**	**32.5%**	**0.0%**	**7.5%**	**22.5%**	**7.5%**	**30.0%**	**100%**
Teambuilding	0	35	0	7	7	4	7	**60**
Percentage of Total Hours in Teambuilding by Board Member	**0.0%**	**58.3%**	**0.0%**	**11.7%**	**11.7%**	**6.6%**	**11.7%**	**100%**
Total Roles & Responsibilities and Teambuilding Hours per Board Member	**0**	**48**	**0**	**10**	**16**	**7**	**19**	**100**
Percentage of Total Roles & Responsibilities and Teambuilding Hours by Board Member	**0.0%**	**48.0%**	**0.0%**	**10.0%**	**16.0%**	**7.0%**	**19.0%**	**100%**

SOURCE: Texas Association of School Boards, Board Member Continuing Education Report, January 2015.

fulfilling the board's responsibilities for goal-setting, policy-making, and evaluation; and I will avoid personal involvement in the activities the board has delegated to the superintendent…" Based on the review team's interviews and focus groups, the majority of board members' actions are not consistent with the board's ethics policy. Moreover, the board president stated, "while board members say they understand their roles and responsibilities, they do not appreciate the fact that they need to let staff do their jobs." The ethics policy does not address an enforcement mechanism for board members that do not follow the policy.

The practice of board members involvement in day-to-day management of the district could undermine the superintendent's leadership and authority. Further, continuing involvement with cabinet-level administrators, principals, and teachers at the campus-level raises questions about the actual authority of principals and cabinet-level administrators, creating an atmosphere of distrust and uncertainty about decision-making at the district and campus levels. This practice makes it difficult for the superintendent to effectively implement key districtwide initiatives essential to improving student achievement.

As a best practice, school boards throughout the United States provide targeted training to board members related to understanding their governance role and related responsibilities. This targeted training includes reviewing, adopting, updating, and signing their code of conduct and ethics policies each year in an effort to assist board members to operate in an ethical, reasonable and conscientious manner. For example, in August 2013, the Richmond, Virginia school board adopted "Standards of Conduct" and established a discipline process in which the board, with a vote of two-thirds of its members, can discipline individual members for conduct deemed detrimental to the board. The penalties include public reprimand, formal censure, and removal from committee assignments. In January 2011, the White Bear Lake Area school board in Minnesota adopted a code of conduct that includes procedures for administering its ethics policy and lists sanctions to impose on an individual school board member for violating ethical standards included in the policy. Education experts agree that sanctions for board members violating school board ethics policies, which typically include references to excessive interference and micromanagement activities by board members, area a "must have" in any ethics policy.

DeSoto ISD's board should amend the local board policy related to board members' ethics to add an enforcement section, and ensure all board members consistently obtain continuing education hours related to their roles and responsibilities. This would help reduce the risk of board members' involvement in daily operations and undermining of the superintendent's authority. The board president should ensure that each board member obtains consistent, "targeted" training in topics related to board member roles and responsibilities, board/superintendent roles and responsibilities, and effective governance.

DeSoto ISD's board should revise the Board of Trustees Operating Procedures to include provisions for enforcing Board Policy BBF (LOCAL) on ethics, including listing specific sanctions to impose on individual board members who violate the policy. Such sanctions could include a "public censure" of the board member(s) for repeated violations of the board's policies and related operating procedures.

The board president, working with the board secretary and board members, should identify language related to enforcing Board Policy BBF (LOCAL) on ethics and should propose a revision to the Board of Trustees Operating Procedures. The board secretary should revise the Board of Trustees Operating Procedures to include language related to enforcing the board's ethics policy and submit the draft for the board to review and approve. The board should review the draft and adopt the revisions to the Board of Trustees Operating Procedures.

The board president should monitor the Board Member Continuing Education Report to identify training topics related to roles and responsibilities that individual board members have not attended. The board president should select targeted training for board members to attend.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

BOARD OPERATIONS (REC. 2)

DeSoto ISD's board has an atmosphere of distrust among board members, resulting in ineffective communication, which compromises the Board of Trustees' ability to openly deliberate issues and effectively govern the district.

Some board members feel their colleagues do not respect them, some feel their colleagues have personal agendas, and others feel some board members have access to information other board members lack. Further, some board members perceive that some members attempt to limit discussion and debate of issues in public, such as out-of-district travel expenditures for the superintendent and his cabinet members.

One member indicated that some board members do not respect other board members, as demonstrated when one board member told another to "shut up" in a public meeting. The board member went further to indicate that not all board members like each other, and there are a couple of members who routinely say the exact opposite of what a particular board member says in board deliberations.

Some board members indicated that they do not trust one of their colleagues because of statements the individual made that have racial overtones. According to one board member, the comments undermined the individual's credibility with board members and eroded trust after they gave this member the "benefit of the doubt." Another board member indicated a lack of trust exists because some members feel the majority of board members protect the superintendent because of perceived personal relationships with the superintendent. Moreover, these members feel the personal relationship between the superintendent and some board members allows some board members to have access to information that not all board members receive. This perception has caused tension among board members, because the board members accused of having preferred access to information feel this is not an accurate characterization, rather it is the result of their experience and preparation for board meetings.

The review team interviews further indicate other issues that contribute to the distrust among board members:

- Some board members prefer not to discuss or deliberate issues in public and consistently want to "hurry through" meetings without properly vetting substantive issues for the district, which causes other members to feel the members know something about the issue(s) they wish not to share in public.
- Four cabinet members filed a written complaint against the entire board with the board president in December 2014, specifically citing harassment by board members under Board Policy DIA (LOCAL), which addresses discrimination, harassment, and retaliation involving district employees. After receiving the complaint, the board president contacted the district's attorney, who investigated the complaint in compliance with Board Policy DIA (LOCAL). After investigating the original written complaint, the attorney modified the investigation to include only two board members One of these members felt the employees should have filed the complaint with the superintendent rather than the board president (although Board Policy DIA (LOCAL) does not contain provisions for filing harassment complaints against board members). Further, this board member felt the board president should have notified him when he received the complaint, which made him suspicious of the process for filing the complaint.
- The board president revisited the district's 2014–15 budget to accommodate two of the three new board members who were elected in May 2014, and allowed them to have input on travel costs and administrative salary increases. Although the previous board had agreed to the 2014–15 budget before the new board members were seated, the president felt it was necessary to allow input from the new members to demonstrate goodwill and begin building trust with the remainder of the board. Other board members did not think it was necessary to re-open the budget discussions to obtain input from the new members, but they followed the board president's leadership. The board agreed to decrease travel costs and forego administrative raises based on input from the two new members. However, the two new board members did not vote to adopt the budget and the vote was 5–2 for adopting the budget. The five board members that voted to adopt the budget took this as an affront to them and the president. This action further elevated their initial feelings of distrust toward the new members.

The board has participated in teambuilding sessions, which is a tool to help to address ineffective communication and distrust among board members. During the review team interviews, one board member stated, "the Team of 8 training was terrible," and needs to be improved. **Figure 1–5**, which shows the number of hours of teambuilding training board members attended as of January 2015, shows one board member (Board Member B) has attended 58 percent of teambuilding related training. The remaining six board members have collectively attended 42 percent of teambuilding related training, with two of them (members A and C) not attending any teambuilding related training.

Further, DeSoto ISD's board has not conducted a formal board self-evaluation since 2010. Board Policy BG (LOCAL) states: "…at least annually, the board shall conduct a self-evaluation of board and board member performance. The evaluation shall consider such items as role recognition, relationship with others, performance at board meetings, and self-improvement activities. The procedure shall also include

a review of those factors that facilitate effective board meetings…" Review team interviews with board members and the superintendent indicated that board members discussed conducting a self-evaluation, but have not decided to proceed. One board member stated, "Board members are not committed to a formal self-evaluation process and, although we have discussed a board self-evaluation, the board has not moved to formalize the process."

One board member also indicated the board previously modified the self-evaluation process to include a representative from TASB to provide training in board self-evaluations during the board's annual workshops rather than conduct a formal self-evaluation. During the training workshop, a number of minor issues related to the overall effectiveness of the board and board members surfaced, but the board took limited action and did not make substantive changes to improve its overall performance. For example, the board created a special information request form to provide to the superintendent when board members requested information from cabinet members. However, according to the board president, this has not been an effective process.

The cumulative effect of the board's interactions has created an atmosphere of ineffective communication and distrust among board members, which has diminished the board's ability to openly deliberate policy and academic, operational, and administrative issues related to critical decisions affecting the district. Additionally, the board's failure to commit to conducting a formal, annual self-evaluation and documenting the process in the Board of Trustees Operating Procedures limits the overall effectiveness of the board and individual members.

In instances where internal conflicts, distrust, and poor communication exist among members of school district governing boards, the AdvancED/Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (AdvancED/SACS CASI) recommends school districts use the services of a professional mediator to resolve these issues that limit the overall effectiveness of the school board. An AdvancED/SACS CASI Special Review Team (Special Review Team) conducted a site visit to Atlanta Public Schools (APS) in December 2010, citing communication, operational, and personal issues among members of the school board that led to ineffective governance. In its report from the site visit to APS, the Special Review Team required the board to "secure and actively use the services of a trained, impartial professional mediator who will work with board members to resolve communication, operational, and personal issues impeding the effectiveness of the governing body." In March 2011, the board hired a mediation team from the University of Georgia's Fanning Institute to help resolve these issues. The Fanning Institute mediation team facilitated an intense two-day workshop with the board for eight hours each day, and followed up with two additional mediation sessions around leadership with the board. After these sessions, board members showed a drastic improvement in their ability to communicate respectfully and productively, and board members handled personal issues that arose between them privately and in a professional manner.

Further, effective boards conduct regular self-evaluations of the board's performance in the areas of:

- board accountability;
- clear understanding of roles and responsibilities;
- open communication among board members;
- identification of the board's strengths and weaknesses;
- effective and productive goal-setting; and
- insight into decision-making.

TASB's Effective Board Practices: An Inventory for School Boards, published in 2011, recommends school boards complete a self-evaluation as part of the annual teambuilding requirement and use it as an opportunity for the board and executive leadership team to determine what needs to be improved to function more effectively in the future. The implementation of this best practice and formalizing the self-evaluation process has been the key to school boards beginning to operate more effectively.

DeSoto ISD should establish a process to annually evaluate the board's overall effectiveness, including the areas of trust and communication, and use the results of this evaluation to plan for board training and team-building activities. The board should begin this process with formalizing the self-evaluation process as an integral part of its annual teambuilding workshops. Formalizing the self-evaluation process should include updating the Board Operating Procedures to document essential features of the process that will improve board and board member performance. Essential features of the process include identifying areas for improvement based on predetermined standards for effective governance, detailing action steps to modify or change processes or actions related to improvement opportunities

the board identifies, and assigning board members or committees to implement the required changes by a specific date. The board president should work with the board vice president and board secretary to update the Board of Trustees Operating Procedures to include details of a formal board self-evaluation process, including mandatory attendance and disposition of action items to improve board and board member performance. The board should adopt the updated Board of Trustees Operating Procedures and begin conducting formal self-evaluations.

The board should also hire a professional mediator to conduct teambuilding sessions to resolve issues affecting communication and trust among board members. An impartial mediator should work with the board to identify the root causes of the communication and trust issues that limit board effectiveness. The mediator should help board members understand each other's personal and philosophical differences and work to achieve common ground on divisive issues. As a result, board members should begin to restore trust, respect each other, and communicate openly. Once the board hires a professional mediator, the board should schedule a minimum of two eight-hour teambuilding sessions, followed by two four-hour follow-up sessions. The board president should work with the board secretary and superintendent to identify a professional mediator skilled in working with K–12 public school boards. The school board should approve the professional mediator and authorize the board president to contract with the professional mediator to conduct teambuilding sessions. The board president should contract with the professional mediator to provide mediation services and schedule the teambuilding retreats.

The fiscal impact for this recommendation assumes the expense of a professional mediator at $450 per hour. The district should contract for two eight-hour sessions ($450 x 16 hours = $7,200) and two four-hour follow-up sessions ($450 x 8 = $3,600), plus travel expenses at $1,500 per trip ($1,500 x 4 trips = $3,000). The total fiscal impact to implement this recommendation is a one-time expense of $16,800 ($7,200 + $3,600 + $6,000).

BOARD AGENDA REVIEW (REC. 3)

DeSoto ISD lacks an effective process to ensure all board members receive board agenda packets in a sufficient amount of time prior to meetings, so that members have time to review the packet and obtain answers to clarifying questions, and all members receive the same information.

Review team interviews with the superintendent and five of the seven board members indicate that some board members have questions about specific agenda items they do not understand. The district's board agenda preparation process requires the board secretary to email board agenda packets to the entire board for their review no later than close of business on the Thursday before the regular board meeting. Sometimes, the board secretary does not e-mail the agenda material to the board until Friday afternoon, shortening the time board members have to review the material and ask questions of the superintendent before the regular meeting on Monday evening.

Once board members receive the agenda material, they have from Thursday or Friday evening until Monday afternoon before the regular board meeting Monday evening to ask questions about specific agenda items that could require additional clarification. Board members can e-mail or call the superintendent to ask questions about agenda items. Some board members do not contact the superintendent for clarification, but wait until the regular board meeting to ask questions, which extends the meeting.

One board member indicated there were instances in which he felt unprepared to deliberate or act on agenda items because he did not have an opportunity to obtain answers to his questions before the regular meeting. Moreover, board members must contact the superintendent individually with their questions and do not have the benefit of the superintendent's responses to other board members' questions. The board has not addressed concerns of individual board members related to board members' perceived lack of access to certain information they feel other members have access to, as well as members complaining about not receiving board agenda packets sufficiently in advance of regular meetings.

When board members do not receive agenda material on time and must review documents in a short timeframe over a weekend, and ask clarifying questions to the superintendent without the benefit of the superintendent's answers to other board members' questions, it limits their ability to deliberate and make thoughtful decisions that could affect the district's operations. The lack of an efficient process for board members to gain understanding of agenda items prior to board meeting could compromise the overall effectiveness of the board in its decision-making process.

Effective school districts prepare and deliver board agenda packets in ample time for board members to absorb the

information in the agenda prior to a regular board meeting. Houston ISD conducts formal board work sessions in lieu of scheduling a second regular meeting in a given month. Houston ISD schedules the work sessions on the Monday afternoon before the regular board meeting on Thursday, and allow board members to ask questions about specific agenda items before the meeting. These work sessions effectively serve as a second meeting, which does not require board action.

DeSoto ISD's board should revise the existing board meeting structure to include a work session for the board before the regular board meeting and revise the board meeting schedule to one monthly meeting. Revising the existing board meeting structure would require the board to reduce the number of regular meetings to one regular meeting per month, add a board work session in lieu of a second regular meeting, and consider moving the regular meeting from Monday evenings to another day during the week. The board should conduct the work session and convene the regular monthly board meeting the same week, at least two days apart, to allow time for the superintendent and cabinet to respond to questions that could require revising agenda items and require re-posting. The board should consider the Houston ISD model with a board work session on Monday and the regular board meeting on Thursday of the same week as a workable meeting structure that allows board members to have a forum for reviewing agenda items and asking questions before the regular meeting. Moreover, moving to one regular meeting per month would allow the superintendent and his staff more time to adequately prepare and distribute agenda items to the board in advance of the work session and regular meeting. If the board continues with the existing board meeting schedule, the superintendent should work to ensure that board members receive the board agenda packet earlier in the week to allow for ample time for board members to review the packet and ask questions.

The board president should work with the superintendent and board to develop a board meeting structure that replaces one regular meeting with a board work session in the same week before the regular meeting. The board president should present the revised board meeting structure to the board for approval. The board should then approve the revised meeting structure.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

ORGANIZATION ALIGNMENT (REC. 4)

DeSoto ISD has a cumbersome, fragmented, and functionally misaligned organization structure, with similar functions split between reporting relationships divided among multiple cabinet-level administrators and the superintendent.

Figure 1–2 shows DeSoto ISD's existing organization structure that divides educational, financial, and operational functions among multiple administrators, including the superintendent. **Figure 1–6** shows some of the positions or functions that report to these administrators. All of the administrators in this figure report directly to the superintendent. Several of these administrators manage one aspect of the district's educational service delivery function. The DeSoto High School principal reports directly to the superintendent, while the other campus administrators, including the DeSoto Freshman Campus and Disciplinary Alternative Education Program administrators report to the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and high schools. The elementary school principals report to the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance and elementary schools and the middle school principals report to the assistant superintendent for student support services, school improvement and middle schools. The superintendent indicated that he assigned each administrator's functions based on their experiences and skills. **Figure 1–6** further shows that unrelated functions report to the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance and elementary schools. For example, the unrelated functions of special education and school resource officers (SRO) and security report to the same administrator. Further, two administrators supervise compatible community involvement functions such as Parent Engagement, After School Programs, and the DeSoto ISD Education Foundation.

Some of the issues with this organization structure include:

- There is a dual reporting relationship for campus principals. For example, elementary school principals indicated that, functionally, they report to the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools, but the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and high schools approves requests for curriculum support services. The principals reported challenges with this structure, as they try to manage the educational and operational functions of their campus. Principals reported that there is inconsistent communication because the assistant superintendents communicate different messages to the principals. Additionally, the district

FIGURE 1–6
DESOTO ISD ORGANIZATION REPORTING RELATIONSHIPS
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

ADMINISTRATOR	REPORTING POSITION/FUNCTION	
Superintendent	High School Principal	
Assistant Superintendent for Operations, Compliance and Elementary Schools	Elementary School Principals	After School Programs
	DeSoto ISD Education Foundation	Special Education
	Executive Director of Assessment and Accountability	PEIMS (1)
	School Resource Officers and Security	Technology
	Grant Development	Crisis Management
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and High Schools	Freshman Campus Principal	WINGS Principal
	Disciplinary Alternative Education Program Principal	Parent Engagement
Assistant Superintendent for Student Support Services, School Improvement, and Middle Schools	Middle School Principals	Transportation
	Health Services	Fine Arts
		Board Policy and Elections
Chief Financial Officer	Director of Financial Services	Child Nutrition
	Purchasing and Assets	Energy Management
	Plant Services	Facility Management/Rentals
Chief Human Resources Officer	All Human Resources Related Functions	
Executive Director of Communications	Community Partnerships	

NOTE: Texas Education Agency, Public Education Information Management System.
SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board, School Review Team, February 2015; DeSoto ISD, Organization, February 2015.

has experienced challenges with fully implementing the curriculum across campuses and gaining teacher buy-in to ensure consistent student learning. Without consistent organizational alignment of the district's educational functions, the district could continue to experience these issues ultimately hindering student achievement.

- Student support services are also an educational function that supports the students' noninstructional needs. The assistant superintendent for student support services, school improvement and middle schools manages some of these functions, such as health services and fine arts; but other administrators oversee some of these functions, such as SROs and security, federal programs, technology, and innovative programs. Some of the tasks for safety and security related issues are not efficiently managed under this structure. For example, some SROs report that they receive direction from campus leadership to perform tasks outside of their security duties, which could take their focus off critical security related matters. This reporting structure averts a seamless approach to the delivery of all planning and services to students. Additionally, the assistant superintendent for student support services, school improvement and middle schools is responsible for board policy and elections. The Board of Trustees hires the superintendent and he is accountable to the board for all district operations. Creating an organizational structure that allows a district administrator, other than the superintendent, oversight of any board operations could cause confusion and miscommunication of important board related information.

- The transportation function is organizationally aligned with the assistant superintendent for student support services, school improvement and middle schools in a contract oversight role. However, the CFO does not have a role in the transportation contract oversight but the CFO tracks and monitors other district contracts. The assistant superintendent

for operations, compliance and elementary schools position also has oversight responsibility for special education, assessment and accountability, PEIMS, grant development, and the DeSoto ISD Education Foundation. The functions are not compatible and extend across several functional areas, including curriculum and instruction, student support services, and community partnerships. For example, special education and assessment and accountability are curriculum and instruction functions that are not supervised by the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and high schools. Further, the DeSoto ISD Education Foundation is a community-based organization and it is not functionally aligned with the executive director of communications position–who reports to the superintendent–that oversees community partnerships.

Additionally, DeSoto ISD position titles at the same level are not consistently aligned. For example, the executive team includes three assistant superintendent positions and two chief positions that report to the superintendent. The executive director of assessment and accountability and the director of financial services are organizationally aligned, as they report to an executive level administrator, but their position titles are not equivalent. The executive director of assessment and accountability reports directly to the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance and elementary schools and the director of financial services reports directly to the CFO. Both positions assume full responsibility for a function in the district and report to an executive administrator, but their position titles are not reflective of their equal level of authority.

Grouping incompatible functions with dual reporting relationships within the district's organization compromises the effective monitoring of the performance of the campuses and departments throughout the district, and contributes to inconsistent support services to schools. Effective districts ensure alignment, oversight, and management of similar functions under one administrator, to promote consistency and accountability. Districts also typically align executive positions as assistant superintendents or chief officers to show consistency across the executive leadership team. This consistency also applies at the other levels of management to ensure managers are clear of their level of authority. Temple ISD organizes its district operations based on a functional organizational structure. Temple ISD is one of three peer districts selected for comparison to DeSoto ISD for this review. Temple ISD's organization is streamlined, functionally aligned with clear lines of authority, and has no dual reporting relationships.

Figure 1–7 shows Temple ISD's organization and illustrates the district's primary functions organized under four assistant superintendents with clearly defined reporting relationships: student services, curriculum and instruction, finance & operations, and human resources. Temple ISD groups all principals, instructional programs, special programs, accountability and assessment, and instructional coaches underneath the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. The organization also consolidates financial and operating functions underneath the assistant superintendent of finance and operations. Further, Temple ISD's organization groups SROs, safe schools, transportation, and nursing underneath the assistant superintendent of student services. The directors of communications and athletics report directly to the superintendent, along with the directors of academies, and unique programs such as fine arts, and the alternative education center.

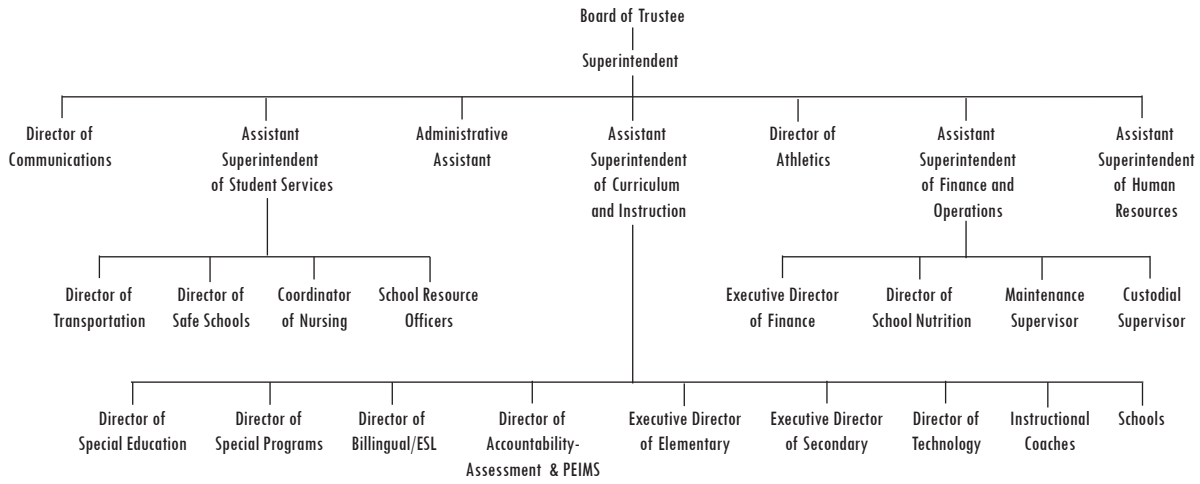
DeSoto ISD should restructure the district's organization by consolidating similar functions divided among the executive leadership team, and revise the related staff and functional changes to align district operations.

Figure 1–8 shows the recommended personnel and function changes at the executive level. The impact of this structure eliminates seven positions and develops six positions. Most of the position eliminations result in a recommendation to develop a new position with essentially the same functions to promote consistency in position titles at each level of leadership. The reports and functions associated with the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools position would realign in other areas of the organization. The recommendation for some of the realignment changes appears in the appropriate functional area chapter of this report.

Figure 1–9 shows the realignment of positions and functions because of the recommended changes in **Figure 1–8**. The realignment shows that the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction position would assume oversight of all educational service delivery functions, including the elementary and middle schools, and the high school.

Figure 1–10 shows the proposed organization for DeSoto ISD reflecting the changes shown in **Figures 1–8** and **1–9**.

FIGURE 1–7
TEMPLE ISD ORGANIZATION
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15



SOURCE: Temple ISD, Superintendent's Office, April 2015.

FIGURE 1–8
SUMMARY OF PROPOSED REORGANIZATION

ACTION FOR REORGANIZATION	POSITION
Eliminate Positions/Functions	Assistant Superintendent for Operations, Compliance and Elementary Schools
	Assistant Superintendent for Student Support Services, School Improvement and Middle Schools
	Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and High Schools
	Chief Financial Officer
	Chief Human Resources Officer
	Executive Director of Communications
	Director of Financial Services
Develop Positions/Functions	Assistant Superintendent for Support Services
	Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
	Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations
	Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources
	Executive Director of Financial Services
	Executive Director of Communications and Parents and Community Partners

SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board, School Review Team, March 2015.

FIGURE 1–9
SUMMARY OF PROPOSED REALIGNMENT ACTIONS

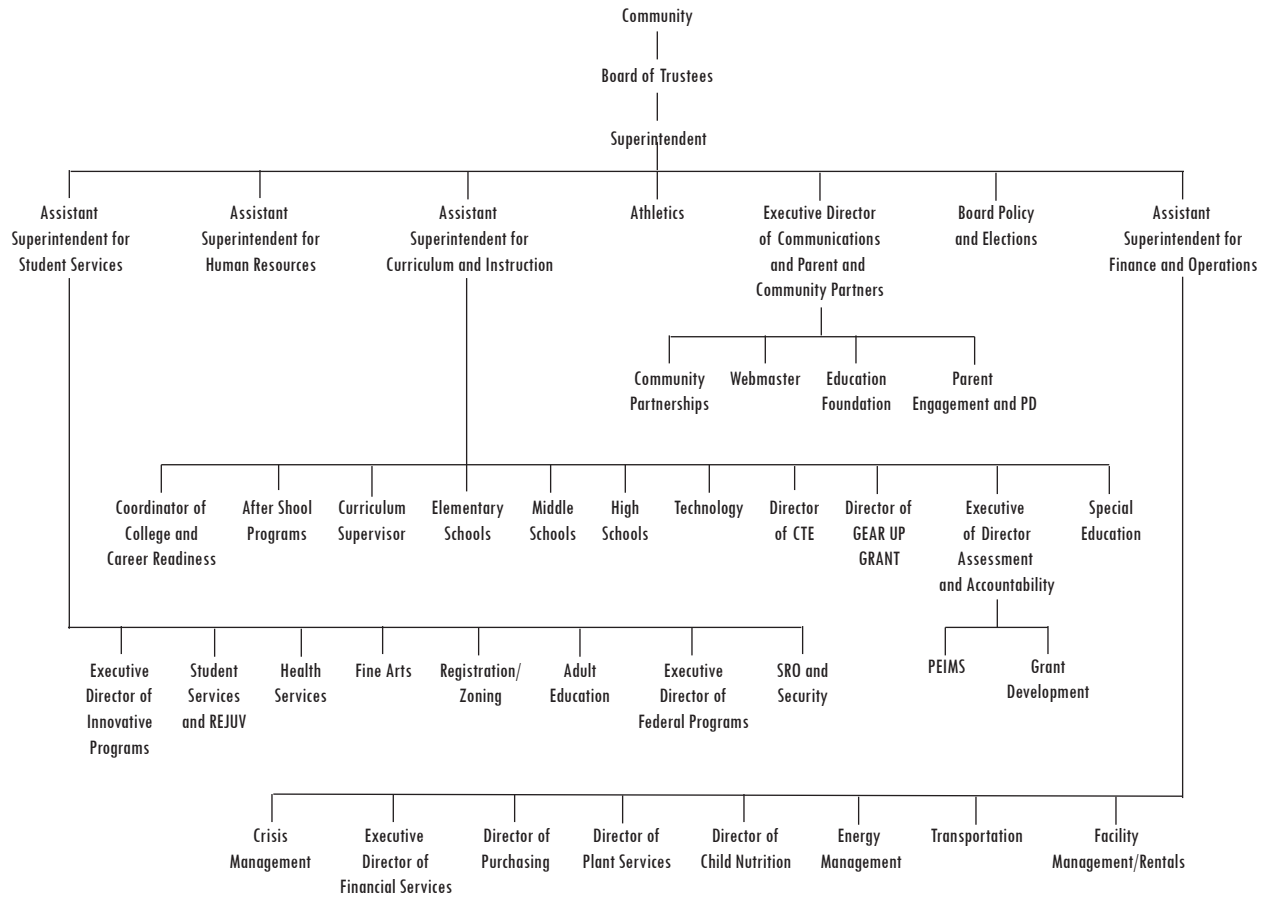
ACTION	POSITION/FUNCTION
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction assumes oversight	Elementary Schools, Middle Schools, and Desoto High School (**Educational Service Delivery** chapter recommends the district develop an Executive Director of Elementary Education and an Executive Director of Secondary Education reporting to the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; the campuses would report directly to one of the executive directors.)
	Special Education function (**Educational Service Delivery** chapter recommends eliminating the Director of Special Education and developing the Executive Director of Special Education)
	Executive Director of Assessment and Accountability position assumes oversight of PEIMS and Grant Development.
	Administrative Technology function
	After School Programs
Assistant Superintendent for Support Services assumes oversight	SRO and Security function
	Federal Programs function
	Innovative Programs function
Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations assumes oversight	Executive Director of Financial Services
	Crisis Management function
	Transportation function (**Transportation** chapter recommends to centralize under the CFO)
Executive Director of Communications and Parent and Community Partners assumes oversight	Education Foundation function (**Community Involvement** chapter recommends to reassign to the Communications Department)
	Parent Engagement function
Superintendent assumes oversight	Board Policy and Elections function

SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board, School Review Team, March 2015.

The superintendent should present the proposed reorganization to the executive team and discuss the impact of the changes related to their positions. The superintendent should streamline DeSoto ISD's organization and modify the existing organization chart based on the proposed organization. The superintendent should present the proposed organization to the district board for approval.

The fiscal impact uses DeSoto ISD's salaries as reflected in the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) salary study from January 2015. The fiscal impact also uses actual salaries to eliminate positions and an average of similar position salaries to develop positions. The fiscal impact estimates a 5 percent base salary increase for positions developed that are essentially a name change but assume additional responsibilities. The district pays 100 percent of employee benefits for each employee that works more than 10 hours per week, at $3,029 annually. The fiscal impact only accounts for positions eliminated or developed that result in a salary change. This fiscal impact assumes that all of the other positions' salaries would remain the same. **Figure 1–11** shows the fiscal impact of this recommendation using the described assumptions. This fiscal impact assumes that eliminating the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance and elementary schools and the director of financial services positions, and developing the executive director of financial services position would result in a net gain for the district of $90,743. This fiscal impact also assumes that increasing the salaries of the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, the assistant superintendent for finance and operations, and the executive director of communications and parents and community partners positions' salaries by 5 percent would result in an expense of $15,791. The total fiscal impact of this recommendation would result in an annual savings of $74,952 ($90,743-$15,791).

FIGURE 1–10
DESOTO ISD PROPOSED ORGANIZATION
SCHOOL YEAR 2015–16



SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board, School Review Team, March 2015.

STRATEGIC PLANNING (REC. 5)

DeSoto ISD's leadership lacks a process to conduct a comprehensive, fully integrated, stakeholder-driven, long-term strategic planning process, which links all of the district's areas of operation to the budget.

In April 2012, the incoming superintendent and the district's executive leadership team initiated a strategic planning process to develop Full Engagement 2015. Full Engagement 2015 is a three-year strategic plan to transform DeSoto ISD into a district "with a culture of systematic unity and continuity where all stakeholders and systems work collectively for the good of all students." During this process, the superintendent and his cabinet members prepared the strategic plan, keeping the board apprised of progress at various intervals throughout the process. The board did not have a goal-setting or vision-setting session with the superintendent, and all of DeSoto ISD's stakeholders were not substantively involved in the process. More significantly, the plan does not include components such as a technology plan and child nutrition, and does not link the allocation of budget resources to goals outlined in the plan as transformational initiatives. For example, the strategic plan and the budget are stand-alone, mutually exclusive documents. Further, the board has not established a broad policy statement regarding an ongoing strategic planning process.

Although the board and DeSoto ISD's stakeholder community were not substantively involved in laying the foundation for Full Engagement 2015, the superintendent and his cabinet members prepared a three-year plan that focuses on using 360-degree ownership, which means involving the entire stakeholder community, the district

FIGURE 1–11
FISCAL IMPACT OF RECOMMENDATIONS

POSITION	SALARY SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15	BENEFITS	SAVINGS/ (COST)
Eliminate			
Assistant Superintendent for Operations, Compliance and Elementary Schools	$108,035	$3,029	$111,064
Director of Financial Services	$80,230	$3,029	$83,259
Develop			
Executive Director of Financial Services (1)	$100,551	$3,029	($103,580)
Increase	**Salary**	**Percent**	
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction (2)	$108,035	5 percent	($5,402)
Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations (2)	$113,776	5 Percent	($5,689)
Executive Director of Communications and Parents and Community Partners (2)	$94,005	5 Percent	($4,700)
Total Fiscal Impact			**$74,952**

NOTES:
(1) The $100,551 salary represents an average of five executive director salaries in DeSoto ISD.
(2) These salaries are from school year 2014–15 for the previous position titles. For example, the assistant superintendent for finance and operations position salary is the CFO position salary in school year 2014–15.
SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board, School Review Team, March 2015; DeSoto ISD, TASB Pay System Review Draft, January 2015.

administrators, teachers, and staff to transform the district and improve student achievement by October 1, 2015. **Figure 1–12** shows the key components of Full Engagement 2015. Full Engagement 2015 includes the district's vision, mission, culture, transformational initiatives (i.e., goals), and transformational actions. The plan links each transformational initiative to transformational actions by department. Each transformational action includes specific, measurable outcomes the district intends to achieve by October 2013 and October 2015. The plan focuses mainly on academics.

The review team's interviews further indicate that the lack of a comprehensive, fully integrated, long-term strategic planning process starts with the board. The superintendent has not been able to get the board to commit to engaging in a comprehensive strategic planning process. Therefore, the superintendent and his cabinet assumed the task of preparing the short-term, Full Engagement 2015 plan without board or stakeholder involvement. One board member described Full Engagement 2015 as the "superintendent's strategic plan." Another board member indicated, "the board has not done much planning…the board flies by the seat of its pants." Only one of the five board members interviewed considered Full Engagement 2015 to be the result of a comprehensive strategic planning process. The remaining board members interviewed, as well as the superintendent, acknowledged the district does not have a comprehensive, long-term strategic plan. However, the district has a stand-alone technology plan and a District Improvement Plan as required by the Texas Education Code.

Stakeholder involvement is essential to developing a long-term strategic plan that meets the educational needs of the community the school district serves. Without involvement from internal and external stakeholders in the strategic planning process, the district cannot develop a shared vision for the future and structure its instructional programs, operations, technology, safety and security, and facility programming to meet the needs of its students and community. Internal stakeholders include the students, board, executive leadership team, administrators, principals, teachers, and staff. External stakeholders include parents, community groups, business leaders, civic organizations, and members from the faith-based community. The district cannot successfully execute its strategic plan without "buy-in" from its stakeholders.

School districts use comprehensive, fully integrated strategic plans to set goals for all district operations. Strategic plans allow school districts to overcome unforeseen events more quickly, allocate budget and human resources to achieve goals more efficiently, and establish accountability standards

FIGURE 1–12
DESOTO ISD'S STRATEGIC PLAN
FULL ENGAGEMENT 2015

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION
Vision	By 2015, DeSoto ISD will have reached a level of full engagement. DeSoto ISD will be a culture of systematic unity and continuity where all stakeholders and systems work collectively for the good of all students.
Mission	The mission of DeSoto ISD is to prepare each student academically and socially to be a problem solver and productive citizen for a 21st Century global society.
Culture of 7	Standards and norms to raise the district's level of expectations for all. Culture of 7 outlines seven categories, each with seven key indicators that define "who the DeSoto ISD is" and "how the DeSoto ISD does business." Culture of 7 includes: **(1) Organizational Core Beliefs** [Students First, Loyalty, Integrity and Mutual Respect, Accountable, Teamwork, Be the Best, No Excuses]; **(2) Organizational Disciplines** [Change is Constant, Focus on *Our* Important(s), Metric-Based Actions, Keeping Score, Accountability, Systemic Operations, Clear Communications]; **(3) Organizational Goals** [Academic Performance, Culture and Climate, Human Capital, Organizational Design and Delivery, Communication, Data Management, Family and Community Involvement]; **(4) Organizational Leadership** [Visionary, Servant, Knowledgeable, Data Driven, Collaborative, Constructive Conservationist, Transformational]; **(5) Organizational Development** [Continuous Training Opportunities, Creating New Programs/Initiatives, Pursuing Funding Opportunities, Building Teacher and Leader Capacity, Monitoring Systematic Diagnoses, Defined Process and Procedures, Systems of Support]; **(6) Organizational Involvement** [Parent and Community Engagement, Participation in District and Campus Activities, Post-Secondary and Business Partnerships, Civic Involvement, Shared Decision-Making, Resources, Learning Change]; and **(7) Organizational T.A.R.G.E.T.S** [Talent, Academics, Rigor, Growth, Evaluation, Timelines, Support].
Transformational Initiatives	Ensure intentional transformational engagement of all DeSoto ISD Employees. Develop instructional leaders within the district through a "grow your own" process of skills development. Build partnerships with parents, community, local colleges, and universities. Improve the quality of instruction. Raise student achievement overall; close the gap in identified populations: special education, bilingual/ESL (1), CTE (2). Create technology-enriched school district that transforms the delivery of instruction and prepares students for the competitive workplace. Increase student enrollment. Help the schools maintain a positive, orderly, and safe school climate. Establish high school academies as a leading producer of students who are college ready and workforce capable. Improve financial status of the district

FIGURE 1–12 (CONTINUED)
DESOTO ISD'S STRATEGIC PLAN
FULL ENGAGEMENT 2015

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION
Key Transformational Actions	Full Engagement 2015 links key transformational action items by department to the 10 transformational initiatives. The following departments have specific action items included in the plan:
	Elementary Education
	Secondary Education
	Professional Development
	Assessment and Accountability
	Student Support
	Finance and Operations
	Human Resources
	Communications

NOTES:
(1) English as a Second Language.
(2) Career and Technical Education.
SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Full Engagement 2015, February 2015.

more effectively. For example, a drop in tax base due to the economic decline in the energy industry could affect the district's budget without proper planning.

Figure 1–13 shows a comprehensive strategic planning process that includes the steps of the plan and the purpose for each step. A strategic plan includes performance measures for each goal and objective, serves as the basis for district operations, and helps orientate the board when evaluating the superintendent and allocating resources. Accordingly, the constructive engagement of the board, superintendent, and stakeholders is essential to the success of the strategic plan.

Additionally, best practices suggest districts design a stakeholder-driven strategic planning process as a complete, fully integrated planning process that addresses the necessary components that move a strategic plan to an operational plan. Process development steps include:

- defining what strategies the district is going to use to achieve its mission, vision, values, goals, and student learning targets;
- identifying a balanced composite of leading and lagging measures to track progress;
- designing a systems map so that everyone understands how all the functions of the district and strategic plan fit together; and
- creating a deployment plan that specifies how the plan moves to action.

In addition to these process development steps, best practices dictate that the strategic plan fully integrate the budgeting process to ensure that budget resources appropriately align with strategic priorities. Successful implementation of the stakeholder-driven strategic planning process, as described in Robert Ewy's Stakeholder-Driven Strategic Planning in Education: A Practical Guide for Developing and Deploying Successful Long- Range Plans (2009) includes the following:

- Clear statements of the challenges district leadership must address over the next five years.
- Clear and carefully defined statements of key student and institutional performance requirements.
- Clear statements of what standards stakeholders use to evaluate the quality of the district's education programs and outcomes.
- A clear understanding of the priorities that direct the development of financial plans and budgets.
- A sense of what the district might do to delight stakeholders.

Figure 1–14 shows steps of a stakeholder-driven strategic planning process. As a best practice, this process introduces the

FIGURE 1–13
STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS
FEBRUARY 2015

STEP	PURPOSE
1: Vision Setting	The board, superintendent, and key stakeholders engage in a vision setting process to determine what characteristics the district would have it operated at the most optimal level.
2: Mission and Goals	The board, superintendent, and key stakeholders align the district's mission and associate goals that, if accomplished, will bring the district closer to fulfilling its vision.
3: Setting Priorities	The board prioritizes the district's most important goals to serve as the basis of the strategic plan.
4: Identifying Barriers	The board, superintendent, and leadership team use data to identify the key barriers to accomplishing the goals.
5: Identifying Resources	The administration links the budgeting process to the planning process to ensure that the budget allocation reflects the district's goals and priorities.
6: Strategy	The superintendent, administration, and key stakeholders, including parents, business leaders, civic organizations, and community groups, develop strategies to accomplish the goals by addressing the identified barriers, creating timelines for completion, assigning accountability, identifying performance measures, and allocating resources.
7: Consensus Building, Review, and Approval	The board, superintendent, and stakeholders build consensus, review the plan for viability, and approve the final document.
8: Implementation and Monitoring	Persons or departments with assigned accountability enact the plan strategies while monitoring progress against performance measures and use of allocated funds.
9: Evaluation	The district evaluates the success of the plan, including which performance measures were met, what goals were fulfilled or what obstacles prevented success. The superintendent presents findings to the board.

SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board, School Review Team, February 2015.

strategy map and balanced scorecard as key features of the stakeholder-driven strategic planning for K-12 school districts. Strategy maps are communication tools that show a logical, step-by-step connection between strategic objectives, implementation initiatives, and desirable outcomes in the form of a cause-and-effect chain of implementation steps to improve the performance of school district operations and academic performance. According to the Balanced Scorecard Institute (BSI), the balanced scorecard is a strategic planning management system used extensively in business and industry, government, and nonprofit organizations worldwide to align business activities to the vision and strategy of the organization, improve internal and external communications, and monitor organization performance against strategic goals.

The balanced scorecard has evolved from its early use as a simple performance measurement framework to a full strategic planning and management system that transforms an organization's strategic plan from a passive document into daily "marching orders" for an organization. Best practice recommends implementing the balanced scorecard in school districts to help the board, superintendent, and executive leadership team identify what the district should do to achieve its strategic goals and what the district needs to measure to achieve the goals. When fully implemented in a district's strategic planning process, the balanced scorecard transforms strategic planning from a traditional "academic exercise" into the "nerve center" of the organization.

DeSoto ISD should implement a comprehensive, fully integrated strategic planning process using elements of the traditional and stakeholder-driven strategic planning processes and link the plan to the budgeting process. This process should include the board of trustees developing a specific policy regarding developing, implementing, and monitoring an ongoing strategic plan. The district should begin the process in school year 2015–16, as the superintendent prepares the district's strategic plan, Full Engagement 2015, to achieve full implementation by October 2015. The long-range strategic plan should include measurable objectives, timelines, and assignments for which the board should hold the superintendent and executive leadership team accountable.

FIGURE 1–14
STAKEHOLDER-DRIVEN STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS, DETAILED STEPS
2009

STEP	ACTION
1	Determine the membership of the planning team.
2	Plan the stakeholder survey and the stakeholder sampling process with a 95 percent confidence level with a ± 2 or 3 percent margin of error. Use community meetings, evening meetings at schools, etc. to conduct focus groups with parents, students, community members, business leaders, etc.
3	Identify stakeholder requirements and expectations through the analysis of survey and focus group data. Analysis includes categorizing and prioritizing stakeholder input.
4	Develop a strategic plan based on stakeholder expectations.
5	Identify current district performance levels using an internal audit process, and then complete a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis.
6	Develop a strategy map and a balanced scorecard based on the strategic plan.
7	Finalize the strategic plan, making sure there is consistency between the plan, the strategy map, and the balanced scorecard. This step is where the strategic plan (Step 4), the strategy map (Step 6) and balanced scorecard (Step 6) are merged into the final plan that goes to the board for adoption.
8	Develop a deployment plan that cascades the plan to all levels of the district.

SOURCE: Stakeholder-Driven Strategic Planning in Education: A Practical Guide for Developing and Deploying Successful Long-Range Plans, Pages 8–11, Robert W. Ewy, 2009.

The district should begin the process with a shared visioning session with the board and superintendent, and expand this traditional planning exercise into a fully engaged, stakeholder-driven strategic planning process. This process should constructively engage students, parents, teachers, administrators, community members, and business leaders in the process of shaping the vision of the district and establishing strategic priorities aligned with the shared vision. Further, this comprehensive, fully integrated process should chart the long-term direction of the district with "buy-in" from stakeholders, and ensure that administrative staff, principals, teachers, and other school-based staff agree with the direction of the district, prioritization of goals, and the allocation of resources for instructional, administrative, and operational areas.

The superintendent should designate a member of his cabinet to oversee and lead the strategic planning process, and form a diverse planning committee that includes members of the district's executive leadership team, community members, business leaders, teachers, and parents. The superintendent should assess the availability of in-house resources to lead the district through the planning process, and determine whether the district would need to obtain external assistance to guide the planning process or assist the district with conducting stakeholder surveys and focus groups. The superintendent should monitor the process and provide periodic progress reports to the board. The board should adopt the strategic planning policy statement and review and approve the strategic plan.

No fiscal impact is assumed for this recommendation until the district determines the need for external assistance.

CABINET MEETINGS (REC. 6)

DeSoto ISD's superintendent does not enforce the cabinet meeting guidelines to ensure orderly and productive meetings and limit distractions from cabinet members.

In August 2012, the superintendent established "Cabinet Guiding Principles" to establish a philosophical framework for conducting weekly cabinet meetings. These principles outline how the superintendent expects cabinet members to build trust, conduct themselves, assume responsibility to share feedback, respect each other, stop and redirect their discussions when appropriate, and commit to a problem-solving process where they could present issues and hear all voices at the table. **Figure 1–15** shows the Cabinet Guiding Principles.

Using the Cabinet Guiding Principles as the foundation for conducting effective cabinet meetings, the superintendent established informal, unwritten rules all cabinet members must follow during meetings. These rules include:

- Cabinet members must attend all cabinet meetings and must be on time. Illness is the only acceptable excuse for missing cabinet meetings.

FIGURE 1–15
DESOTO ISD CABINET GUIDING PRINCIPLES
AUGUST 2012

AS WE STRIVE TO BECOME A HIGH–PERFORMING TEAM AND PREMIER DISTRICT, WE COMMIT TO EACH OTHER THAT WE WILL:

- Show courtesy and respect to each other by being mindful of what we say and how we act;
- Trust one another and commit to each to be the best;
- Embrace opportunities to improve through focused efforts of change;
- Respect and embrace diversity of our team so as to maximize our collective expertise and backgrounds;
- Build each other's credibility and be loyal to each other in our actions and words. Our staff will believe what we say and watch how we act;
- Value, learn and appreciate the history and context of the district;
- Take personal responsibility to share feedback in the moment and to listen and reflect when feedback is offered;
- Laugh out loud, celebrate all wins, and have fun along the way;
- Make decisions by stating our point simply, sharing analysis fully and being okay to let things go; and
- Build fraternity by creating a safe place for our team to vent and standing behind our decisions as a team.

WE WILL HOLD OURSELVES ACCOUNTABLE TO THESE GUIDING PRINCIPLES THROUGH MUTUAL COMMITMENT TO:

- Building individual relationships with our peers;
- Establish and adhere to a problem-solving process where issues can be stated and all voices at the table can be expressed;
- Be willing to stop discussions and redirect our peers when we observe behaviors contrary to our guiding principles; and
- Use tactics such as rephrasing with, 'What I heard' and beginning conversations with intent for listeners such as 'I need your input' or 'I would like to discuss.'

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, August 2012.

- Members cannot use cell phones unless the superintendent allows them to take a call for special circumstances or emergencies. Special circumstances include calls related to the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) testing during the week of testing, and emergencies include calls from principals regarding unique situations or incidents at their schools.
- Only one person speaks at a time and members must not interrupt each other. If a cabinet member has questions, they must record the questions and ask them when the cabinet member finishes speaking.
- There should be limited, rare interruptions from cabinet members' secretaries or administrative assistants. Secretaries and administrative assistants should only interrupt cabinet meetings when the superintendent requests documents.

Although the superintendent established Cabinet Guiding Principles and informal rules for conducting cabinet meetings, review team interviews indicate that the majority of cabinet members described the cabinet meetings as lacking a formal structure and process to ensure the superintendent leads efficient and effective meetings. While all of the cabinet members praised the fluid, free-flowing dialogue and candid exchanges that occur during the meetings, the majority felt the absence of a formal structure, process, and discipline leads to distractions during the meeting. For example, the majority of cabinet members interviewed cited instances of inconsistent attendance, use of cell phones during the meetings, side bar conversations, multiple participants speaking at the same time, and interruptions by cabinet members' secretaries or administrative assistants.

In some instances, cabinet meetings have not always been efficient due to the lack of formal structure, processes, and meeting protocols. This affects the length of meetings, districtwide decision-making, and communication regarding initiatives and directives to the district's full central office leadership, principals, teachers, and staff. For example, interruptions from cabinet members while district leadership discusses programs and implementation initiatives could result in misunderstanding of information and lead to miscommunication to staff. Further, sidebar conversations create territories during cabinet meetings and distract the meeting attendees from the discussion.

Best practices indicate that effective superintendents seek honest feedback from cabinet members to ensure efficient cabinet meetings are conducted. According to the Seduction of the Leader: The Superintendent's Dilemma, written by Patrick Sanaghan of the Sanaghan Group, and published on the American Association of School Administrators' website,

periodically, superintendents should anonymously evaluate the effectiveness of their cabinet meetings. Everyone on the senior cabinet has opinions about their meetings. It is essential to create a vehicle to bring those opinions and ideas into full view. An anonymous questionnaire that asks five simple questions can give superintendents all the information they need to continue to improve the value of their cabinet meetings. These questions might be:

- How effective are our meetings (on a scale of 1 to 10)?
- How involved do you feel in our meetings (on a scale of 1 to 10)?
- What is currently working well in our meetings?
- What needs to change in order for our meetings to be more effective?
- What advice or feedback do you have for me that would enhance my effectiveness in the meetings?

Superintendents capture the feedback from this anonymous survey and communicate it to the leadership team as soon as possible. Then, the superintendents use the information to improve cabinet meetings in the future. The author acknowledges: "this kind of transparency is rare in most school districts, and it conveys a learning attitude on the part of the senior leadership. It will also improve the quality of your district meetings, which can often seem endless and a waste of time."

The superintendent should implement a formal structure and process to support the Cabinet Guiding Principles for more effective cabinet meetings to include conducting an anonymous survey of the cabinet members to obtain feedback about the effectiveness of cabinet meetings and use the results to. This survey should include open-ended questions to capture specific comments from members about the structure, process, and discipline of the meetings, and suggestions for improvement. The superintendent should use this feedback to establish a cabinet meeting structure and related protocols to support the Cabinet Guiding Principles, which could result in more efficient and effective cabinet meetings.

The superintendent should distribute the survey in a weekly cabinet meeting. The superintendent should establish a target date for the cabinet members to complete and return the survey to his secretary. The superintendent should review the feedback included in the survey and discuss with cabinet members during a weekly cabinet meeting. The superintendent should implement changes and enforce the principles to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of cabinet meetings.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

COMMUNICATION AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION (REC. 7)

DeSoto ISD's executive leadership team lacks a consistent method to deliver key messages, initiatives, and directives from cabinet meetings to campus administrators, teachers and central office staff throughout the district, and does not effectively include principals in campus level decisions.

Cabinet members communicate key messages, initiatives, and directives to principals through the assistant superintendents during monthly leadership meetings. Typically, the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance and elementary schools and the assistant superintendent for student support services, school improvement, and middle schools communicate the relevant information to principals to take back to their respective schools to share with teachers and staff. However, the common theme from review team interviews with members of the superintendent's cabinet and the high school principal, and focus groups with elementary and middle school principals is that communication is not consistent and the schools are often unaware of basic initiatives agreed to by the executive leadership team. For example, in school year 2015–16, DeSoto ISD is planning to convert some of its existing campuses to academies. The district leadership did not include principals in the planning process as decisions were made to convert various campuses to academies. During review team focus groups with elementary and middle school principals, the review team subsequently verified that the district's executive leadership team did not include principals in the initial stages of planning for new academic programs, establishing magnet academies, and converting campuses to serve different grades than they served in the previous school year. Elementary and middle school principals responsible for implementing the new academic programs indicated a lack of clear communication of the proposed initiatives from the leadership team often forced them to "figure out how to make the programs work." The elementary and middle school principals cited the following instances of the executive leadership team's failure to engage them in the initial planning and communication of new programs and initiatives:

- "I had no advanced notice that my school would be converted to include a Fine Arts Academy."
- "The assistant superintendent verbally told me my school would include a Male Leadership Academy."
- "Sometimes, principals do not have all of the information about proposed programs to communicate to their respective teams. We do not have an opportunity to be part of the planning for new programs."
- "My campus is going to be converted to add an early childhood Pre-K3 and Pre-K4 program, and I was not involved in the planning and research that led to the decision."
- "Communication to all principals who will absorb additional teacher aides from the conversion of elementary schools to include early childhood programs is not there. My campus is being converted and we are not getting communication related to the logistics of the conversion. We have only been given the title of the programs, but no training or communication of 'how-to' effectively implement the program."
- "The lack of planning for the Innovative Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (iSTEAM3D) program hurt my school academically because we had to fix problems associated with the roll-out of the programs, which took time away from focusing on academics."

Further, middle school principals indicated communication is sometimes inconsistent among assistant superintendents, with one assistant superintendent communicating a different message than another assistant superintendent who participated in the same cabinet meeting. Elementary school principals shared the following comments during their focus group:

- "In some cases, communication from the assistant superintendents depends on the importance and scale of the initiative: if it is not that 'big of a deal,' communication is clear. Complex initiatives usually are not clear in terms of implementation and outcome."
- "Teachers may say they are 'unaware' of initiatives because they are not clear on the initiative communicated. Principals are not clear on the initiatives themselves."
- "Communication from members of the executive leadership team and central office is so inconsistent; I will not share information with my teachers unless I get it in writing. There is inconsistent, disparate communication from multiple sources. Because of the disjointed communication, we tend to rely on each other to clarify the communications we receive."

The superintendent is concerned about how the executive leadership team communicates and monitors key messages, initiatives, and directives to teachers and staff below central and school administrative levels. He takes it upon himself to validate the efficacy of communication throughout the district by personally visiting campuses to determine if executive leadership has effectively communicated key messages, initiatives, and directives to principals, teachers, and staff. The superintendent refers to this "informal" monitoring procedure as his "see, touch, and feel philosophy." He encourages members of his cabinet to use the same philosophy.

Failure to effectively communicate and monitor key messages, initiatives, and directives down through the district creates a communication gap throughout the district. This communication gap contributes to confusion among members of the central office staff, campus leadership, teachers, and staff because they are often unclear about the intent of initiatives or directives. Further, principals must use their judgment to interpret the intent and implementation of programs, which could ultimately affect their schools' academic performance. As a result, principals, teachers, and staff often revert to indirect communication channels to interpret or help them understand key messages, initiatives, and directives, rather than obtaining a clear understanding from a coordinated, consistent communication effort at the executive leadership level of the district. The indirect communication channels include colleagues at the campus level and in the central office who could know members of the superintendent's cabinet, fellow principals who attended monthly leadership meetings, or teachers who have relationships with central office personnel.

Failure to include principals in the planning process for implementing new campus level initiatives could result in fragmented and ineffective implementation. When central office administrators do not obtain input from staff affected by decisions to implement new programs or make grade-level

changes during the planning phase, the district could lose valuable insight into specific challenges principals face based on the unique characteristics of their respective campuses.

The Council of the Great City Schools, in its publication *Building Public Confidence in Urban Schools: It Begins Inside the District, A Guide for Administrators and Board Members (2009-2010)*, says all school district leaders are responsible for communicating with employees. It goes further to say that school district leaders should "build leadership" by recognizing the need for internal communication and consider the following:

- keeping managers, supervisors, and principals informed so that they can disseminate information to their employees and teachers, respectively; and
- conducting scheduled meetings with employees by the director of schools, senior, and middle management.

The publication also suggests developing strategies and tactics to "build bridges" to all segments of the organization, which would significantly improve communications from the executive leadership team to employees throughout the school system.

Best practices suggest central administrators involve principals in decision-making, including planning. According to the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's "By Request Series'" Building Trusting Relationships for School Improvement: Implications for Principals and Teachers, published in September 2003, the authors suggest school districts facilitate authentic participation in decision-making by asking for the input of those affected by decisions, providing background information necessary for staff to weigh in on decisions, and treating teachers as capable professionals whose insights are valuable (Black, 1997; Blasé & Blasé, 2001). This concept equally applies to members of the executive leadership team involving principals in planning for new programs affecting their schools.

The Southern Regional Education Board, in its publication *The District Leadership Challenge: Empowering Principals to Improve Teaching and Learning* (2009), suggests district leaders must support a comprehensive framework for school-level improvement and implementation. Central office staff must reach agreement with principals about the improvement design and then expect schools to implement it; and this agreement should occur in the planning process. Effective school districts realize that including principals in the initial planning stages of new programs allows them to become familiar with the program's objectives, design, logistics for implementation, and measurable outcomes, thereby making it easier to obtain buy-in from teachers and staff during the transition.

DeSoto ISD should establish a formal internal communications plan to effectively deliver the district's internal communications to employees throughout the district, and incorporate steps to include key stakeholders, such as principals, in the early planning stages of district initiatives related to campus-level changes.

The executive director of communications should work with the superintendent's cabinet to develop specific strategies and tactics to include in a formal internal communications plan designed to communicate and monitor key messages, initiatives, and directives from cabinet meetings. These strategies and tactics should recognize the importance of clear, concise, and coordinated communication of key messages and initiatives disseminated by the executive leadership team. The Council of the Great City Schools recommends the following strategies and tactics that should be included in the plan:

- develop a consistent electronic communications vehicle to keep managers, supervisors, and principals informed, such as a weekly fact sheet detailing initiatives and directives from executive leadership team meetings;
- conduct periodic, scheduled meetings between employees (teachers and staff) and the director of schools and members of the executive leadership team, including principals, middle managers and supervisors within their respective functions;
- develop an employee opinion survey to determine through which communication tools employees desire or prefer to be informed about issues from the executive leadership team to enable them to buy into the system;
- refine and improve existing communication vehicles used to disseminate information to employees, including newsletters, e-mails, and telephone messaging;
- create a "communications toolkit" for principals and managers that include key messages to be shared when describing a major initiative from the executive leadership team, memo templates for use in

communicating with staff, principals, and teachers, and talking points for staff meetings; and

- convene a standing internal communications advisory group consisting of school principals, central office management, staff, teachers and the executive director of communications.

The superintendent should direct the executive director of communications to work with cabinet members to develop a formal internal communications plan. The executive director of communications should use the feedback from the executive leadership team to develop the internal communications plan. The superintendent should review and approve the plan. The superintendent should approve the appointment of a standing internal communications advisory group to monitor the effectiveness of communications of key messages, initiatives, and directives throughout the district.

The superintendent should also work with his cabinet members to identify a method to include campus leaders and other district stakeholders in planning for program changes at the campus level. The superintendent should ensure that this process would foster a collaborative district planning effort and lead to buy-in at the campus level for district initiatives. The superintendent should discuss with the campus leaders any unique challenges that could arise when the district chooses to make changes.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

CAMPUS LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND TRAINING (REC. 8)

DeSoto ISD lacks a consistent, structured process to prepare and empower principals to be effective operational leaders of their campus.

The district does not have a formal training program for new or tenured principals. During interviews with elementary and middle school principals, newly appointed principals indicated the district did not adequately train them to assume the leadership, management, and operational responsibilities essential to be effective principals. Some newly appointed principals indicated that they primarily rely on training received from observing principals at their previous campus. One principal indicated he received adequate, informal training when working for his former principal, who worked with him to prepare him to lead his own campus. Other principals said that they did not ask for help in their roles as new principals because they felt it presents a negative perception to the assistant superintendents and superintendent when you ask for training because you do not know or understand certain areas for which you are responsible, such as Title I, site based decision-making, and budgeting. One principal stated "it would be good as a new principal to be able to ask for help and feel safe asking." Tenured principals with three or more years in the job indicated the district also did not provide them with refresher training in instructional leadership, budgeting and finance, and Title I.

The lack of formal training for principals could lead to management and operational shortfalls, such as, at the time of the onsite review, the Campus Educational Improvement Committees (CEIC) in two elementary schools, and two middle schools did not have business representatives as required by the Texas Education Code Section 11.251(b). TEC Section 11.251(b) states:

> "The board shall establish a procedure under which meetings are held regularly by district- and campus-level planning and decision-making committees that include representative professional staff, parents of students enrolled in the district, business representatives, and community members. The committees shall include a business representative without regard to whether the representative resides in the district or whether the business the person represents is located in the district."

DeSoto ISD Board Policy BQB (LEGAL) follows the framework of the TEC, stating that campus improvement committees "must include business representatives without regard to whether a representative resides in the district or whether the business the person represents is located in the district." Board Policy BQB (LOCAL) goes further to designate a "minimum number" of business representatives the committee must have and the method of selection. Board Policy BQB (LOCAL) states in part:

> "The committee shall include at least two business representatives, selected in accordance with administrative procedures that provide for adequate representation of the community's diversity. The principal shall use several methods of communication to ensure that community residents are informed of the committee and are provided the opportunity to participate, and shall solicit volunteers."

The absence of business representation on the CEICs impedes the campus's ability to get valuable feedback and

monetary resources in addition to their budget allocation. Campuses without business representatives fail to implement board policy. Additionally, the district is at risk of not obtaining business input in its campus-level and district-level decision-making processes.

Another shortfall is the principals' ability to implement site-based decision-making effectively. During principals' focus groups most of the principals expressed concern about the lack of authority to run their campuses and make personnel, budget, and instructional decisions to improve student learning and their campus environments. For example, according to the principals, the district's protocol is to accept a principal's recommendation when filling a special education teacher position. However, in one instance, the central office "re-interviewed" the candidate and assigned the recommended candidate to another campus. Incidents like this create a feeling of distrust from the principals' perspective with the central office because one principal stated, "we are not empowered to make personnel hires because of central office distrust in our decision-making skills."

Without a dedicated principals' training program, DeSoto ISD could risk the academic achievement of their students, as principals focus more on operational and not the instructional aspects of their job.

Beaumont ISD established a Principals' Academy in June 2013 to provide continuing professional development to elementary, middle and high school principals in the areas of budgeting, campus administration, site-based decision-making, and the effective implementation of board policies and district procedures. The district established this academy in response to new and tenured principals' training requests. The Principals' Academy offers professional development for new and tenured principals during the summer months.

DeSoto ISD should establish a formal, ongoing training program for new and tenured principals.

The executive leadership team should work with the chief human resources officer to design specific, targeted training for new and tenured principals. The chief human resources officer should conduct a survey of principals to determine the types of training that would be beneficial in their roles as principals. This training should, at a minimum, include the following areas:

- site-based decision making;
- budgeting and school finance;
- Title I and federal programs;
- instructional leadership;
- school operations and management;
- time management and delegation;
- due process, grievances, and evaluations; and
- safety and crisis planning.

The superintendent should direct the chief human resources officer to lead the executive leadership team in designing the targeted training. The chief human resources officer, along with the executive leadership team, should design the principals' training program. The superintendent should approve the training program for new and tenured principals. The chief human resources officer should use internal resources to conduct the training.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

FISCAL IMPACT

Some of the recommendations provided in this report are based on state or federal laws, rules, or regulations, and should be promptly addressed. Other recommendations are based on comparisons to state or industry standards, or accepted best practices, and should be reviewed to determine the level of priority, appropriate timeline, and method of implementation.

RECOMMENDATION	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	TOTAL 5–YEAR (COSTS) OR SAVINGS	ONE–TIME (COSTS) OR SAVINGS
CHAPTER 1. DISTRICT ORGANIZATION, LEADERSHIP, AND MANAGEMENT							
1. Amend the local board policy related to board members' ethics to add an enforcement section, and ensure all board members consistently obtain continuing education hours related to their roles and responsibilities.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
2. Establish a process to annually evaluate the board's overall effectiveness, including the areas of trust and communication, and use the results of this evaluation to plan for board training and team-building activities.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	($16,800)
3. Revise the existing board meeting structure to include a work session for the board before the regular board meeting and revise the board meeting schedule to one monthly meeting.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
4. Restructure the district's organization by consolidating similar functions divided among the executive leadership team, and revise the related staff and functional changes to align district operations.	$74,952	$74,952	$74,952	$74,952	$74,952	$374,760	$0
5. Implement a comprehensive, fully integrated strategic planning process using elements of the traditional and stakeholder-driven strategic planning processes and link the plan to the budgeting process.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
6. Implement a formal structure and process to support the Cabinet Guiding Principles for more effective cabinet meetings to include conducting an anonymous survey of the cabinet members to obtain feedback about the effectiveness of cabinet meetings.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0

RECOMMENDATION	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	TOTAL 5-YEAR (COSTS) OR SAVINGS	ONE TIME (COSTS) OR SAVINGS
CHAPTER 1. DISTRICT ORGANIZATION, LEADERSHIP, AND MANAGEMENT							
7. Establish a formal internal communications plan to effectively deliver the district's internal communications to employees throughout the district, and incorporate steps to include key stakeholders, such as principals, in the early planning stages of district initiatives related to campus-level changes.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
8. Establish a formal, ongoing training program for new and tenured principals.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
TOTAL	**$74,952**	**$74,952**	**$74,952**	**$74,952**	**$74,952**	**$374,760**	**($16,800)**

CHAPTER 2. EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY

An independent school district's educational service delivery function is responsible for providing instructional services to Texas students based on state standards and assessments. A school district should identify students' educational needs, provide instruction, and measure academic performance. Educational service delivery can encompass a variety of student groups, and requires adherence to state and federal regulations related to standards, assessments, and program requirements.

Managing educational services is dependent on a district's organizational structure. Larger districts typically have multiple staff dedicated to educational functions, while smaller districts have staff assigned to multiple educational-related tasks. Educational service delivery identifies district and campus priorities, establishes high expectations for students, and addresses student behavior. The system should provide instructional support services such as teacher training, technology support, and curriculum resources. To adhere to state and federal requirements, an educational program must evaluate student achievement across all content areas, grade levels and demographic groups.

DeSoto Independent School District's (ISD) student enrollment in school year 2013–14 was 9,399 students. **Figure 2–1** shows the district's 12 campuses: seven elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools. In addition to these 12 campuses, the district also has a dropout prevention/recovery campus (WINGS), a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) campus, and is a member in the Dallas County Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP).

FIGURE 2–1
DESOTO ISD SCHOOLS
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS	MIDDLE SCHOOLS	HIGH SCHOOLS
Amber Terrace	East Middle	DeSoto Freshman Campus
Cockrell Hill	McCowan Middle	DeSoto High
Frank D. Moates	West Middle	
Northside		
Ruby Young		
The Meadows		
Woodridge		

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

Figure 2–2 shows how DeSoto ISD student characteristics differ from Regional Education Service Center X (Region 10) and the state. DeSoto ISD has a considerably larger percentage of African American students and lower percentages of Hispanic and White students. With 65.9 percent economically disadvantaged students, DeSoto ISD surpasses the Region 10 and state percentages of 57.0 percent

FIGURE 2–2
DESOTO ISD STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND CHARACTERISTICS COMPARED TO REGION 10 AND STATE
SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14

	DESOTO ISD		REGION 10		STATE	
	ENROLLMENT	PERCENTAGE	ENROLLMENT	PERCENTAGE	ENROLLMENT	PERCENTAGE
Students	**9,399**	**N/A**	793,963	N/A	5,135,880	N/A
African American	**7,285**	**78%**	146,832	19%	650,919	13%
Hispanic	**1,669**	**18%**	341,684	43%	2,660,463	52%
White	**277**	**3%**	236,154	30%	1,511,700	29%
Economically Disadvantaged	**6,197**	**66%**	455,151	57%	3,092,125	60%
At-Risk	**3,420**	**36%**	371,067	47%	2,562,457	50%
Bilingual/ESL	**629**	**7%**	160,449	20%	878,569	17%
Special Education	**914**	**10%**	68,663	9%	434,825	9%

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Reports, school year 2013–14.

and 60.2 percent, respectively. DeSoto ISD's percentages of at-risk and bilingual/English as a Second Language (ESL) students are lower than Region 10 and state rates. However, the district's percentage of special education students is higher.

Figure 2–3 shows that DeSoto ISD exceeds the regional and state teacher turnover rate by 1.4 and 1.6 times, respectively. DeSoto ISD has a staff of 1,003 full-time-equivalent positions (FTE), of which 727, or 73 percent are teachers. DeSoto ISD's percentage of staff that are teachers and beginning teachers are slightly higher than Region 10 and state rates. While DeSoto ISD's teachers have a similar average number of years experience as Region 10, their average tenure with the district is lower than regional and state averages.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) rated DeSoto ISD Academically Acceptable in its state accountability rating system from school years 2003–04 to 2008–09 and in 2010–11 to 2011–12. In school year 2009–10, the district's accountability rating was Recognized. In school years 2012–13 and 2013–14 the district had a Met Standard accountability rating. However, in school year 2013–14, TEA rated four of its 12 campuses (25 percent) Improvement Required. The four campuses included one elementary school – Amber Terrace – two of the three middle schools – East Middle School and McCowan Middle School – and DeSoto High School. Improvement Required is an unacceptable rating indicating that the school missed the target on one or more of the four performance indices. The four performance indices are student achievement, student progress, closing performance gaps and postsecondary readiness. DeSoto ISD has a higher longitudinal dropout rate than Region 10 and the state. The district lags behind Region 10 and the state academically as manifested in its lower graduation rate, percentage of students taking Advanced Placement or dual credit courses, college readiness, percentage of students tested above criterion on national college admission examinations SAT or ACT, and average SAT and ACT scores. **Figure 2–4** shows that for school year 2013–14, 59 percent of DeSoto ISD High School graduates enrolled in Texas institutions of higher learning, however, of that percentage only 55 percent completed one year without remediation. The DeSoto ISD graduation rate was 81 percent compared to the state average of 88 percent.

FIGURE 2–3
TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS FOR DESOTO ISD, REGION 10, AND STATE
SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14

	DESOTO ISD		REGION 10		STATE	
	EDUCATORS	PERCENTAGE	EDUCATORS	PERCENTAGE	EDUCATORS	PERCENTAGE
Teachers	**573**	**57%**	51,134	54%	334,511	51%
Highest Degree Held						
No degree	**6**	**1%**	526	1%	2,948	1%
Bachelors	**422**	**74%**	35,994	70%	252,098	75%
Masters	**144**	**25%**	14,196	28%	77,561	23%
Doctorates	**1**	**0.2%**	419	1%	1,904	1%
Years of Experience						
Beginning teachers	**72**	**13%**	4,970	10%	27,784	8%
1–5 years experience	**136**	**24%**	13,737	27%	84,723	25%
6–10 years experience	**159**	**28%**	12,429	24%	76,408	23%
11–20 years experience	**131**	**23%**	13,330	26%	90,395	27%
More than 20 years experience	**76**	**13%**	6,668	13%	55,202	17%
Average years of experience	**10**	**N/A**	10	N/A	11	N/A
Average years of experience with district	**6**	**N/A**	7	N/A	8	N/A
Turnover rate	**26%**	**N/A**	18%	N/A	16%	N/A

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Reports, school year 2013–14.

Figure 2–5 shows DeSoto ISD's educational service delivery organizational structure. The assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools; the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools; the assistant superintendent for student support services, school improvement, and middle schools; the executive director of assessment and accountability; and the high school principal serve as the administrative leaders for educational services.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- DeSoto ISD recognized the need and has worked to increase the number and range of educational programs aimed at increasing student engagement, enrollment, and preparation for and success in college, thus helping the district develop into a district of choice.
- DeSoto ISD has an exemplary Career and Technical Education program with state-of-the-art facilities and equipment and extensive involvement of business and industry.
- DeSoto ISD established the Where I Now Gain Success (WINGS) dropout prevention and dropout recovery program that has assisted more than 300 students to graduate from high school.
- DeSoto ISD established a grant implementation infrastructure with wraparound services that provides teachers with resources to facilitate instruction and support promoting academic achievement and successful preparation of underserved students for college.

FINDINGS

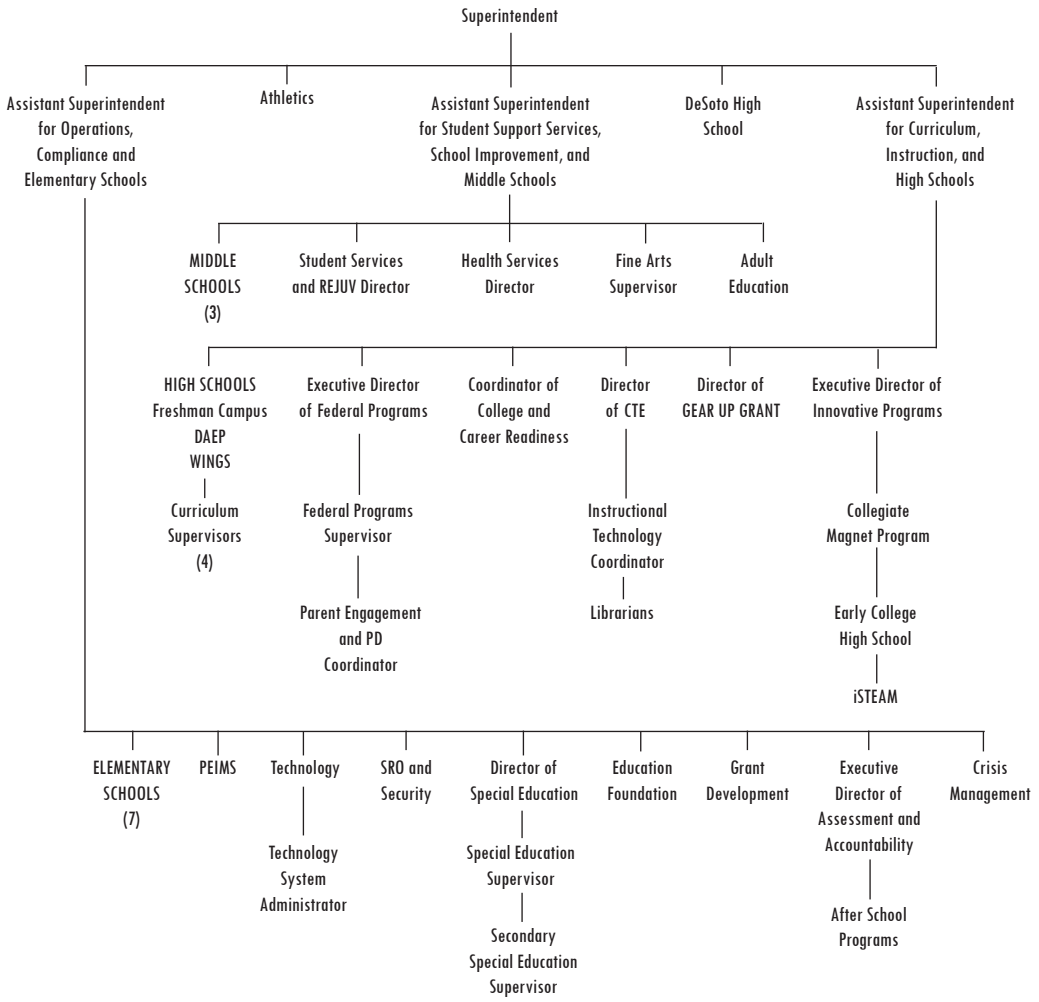
- DeSoto ISD lacks a process to fully implement the curriculum management system to ensure that students learn with consistent pacing, fidelity, and rigor.
- DeSoto ISD lacks a system that ensures that students remain in school, resulting in a low graduation rate and a high dropout rate.
- DeSoto ISD's World Languages program lacks a fully developed curriculum, instructional consistency within and across grade levels, and formalized coordination among teachers.

FIGURE 2–4
DESOTO ISD STUDENT ATTENDANCE, DROPOUT, GRADUATION, AND COLLEGE PREPARATION AND READINESS COMPARED TO REGION 10 AND STATE
SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14

	DESOTO ISD	REGION 10	STATE
Attendance rate	**96%**	96%	96%
Longitudinal dropout rate	**8%**	6%	7%
Graduation rate (Class of 2013)	**81%**	88%	88%
Advanced courses/dual enrollment	**20%**	33%	31%
College-ready students—both English/language arts and mathematics	**49%**	59%	56%
SAT- or ACT-tested	**68%**	66%	64%
Tested at or above criterion	**7%**	30%	25%
Average SAT score	**1261**	1446	1422
Average ACT score	**17**	21	21
Gradates enrolled in Texas institutions of higher learning (IHL)	**59%**	57%	47%
Graduates in Texas IHL completing one year without remediation	**55%**	70%	69%

NOTE: SAT and ACT are national college admission examinations.
SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Reports, school year 2013–14.

FIGURE 2–5
DESOTO ISD EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY ORGANIZATION
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15



NOTES:
(1) DAEP – Disciplinary Alternative Education Program
(2) Wings – Where I Now Gain Success
(3) CTE – Career and Technical Education
(4) PD – Professional Development
(5) PEIMS – Public Education Information Management System
(6) SRO – school resource officer
SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board, School Review Team, February 2015; DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

- DeSoto ISD lacks a system that clearly defines the role of the instructional support function to meet teachers' needs, including the roles of coordinators and supervisors.
- DeSoto ISD lacks sufficient ongoing training necessary to ensure that teachers effectively implement the Response to Intervention process.
- DeSoto ISD lacks an adequate system to provide oversight, monitoring, and training of teachers concerning the appropriate number of special education students alternatively assessed to comply with federal guidelines.
- DeSoto ISD does not provide adequate professional development teacher training to meet the requirements for the state of Texas teacher certification.

- DeSoto ISD lacks adequate technology support to ensure teachers fully integrate the use of technology into the classroom.
- DeSoto ISD lacks a system to ensure that teachers fully implement the district's student behavior management model to address the high number of student behavior incidents.
- DeSoto ISD's Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) lacks the infrastructure to establish individual student goals to plan for an academic program responsive to each student's needs.
- DeSoto ISD lacks a process to ensure that its libraries' budget, staff, collection size, and collection age align with public school library standards.
- DeSoto ISD lacks an effective system to reduce teacher absenteeism and ensure that the district minimizes its use of substitute teachers in the classroom.
- DeSoto ISD lacks a program evaluation system to ensure the periodic and consistent evaluation of district programs and use the results for program improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 9: Conduct a systematic review of curriculum management system implementation and monitoring districtwide; identify areas at each campus where implementation does not meet implementation criteria such as consistent pacing, fidelity, and rigor; and identify best practice strategies to address these areas.**
- **Recommendation 10: Develop and implement a comprehensive system to monitor and track student data to implement strategies to improve graduation rates and reduce dropout rates.**
- **Recommendation 11: Strengthen the formal instructional and operational structure of the World Languages program through the development of Spanish, French, and other needed foreign languages, consistent assessments, and use of resources, and place the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools as the program's supervisor.**
- **Recommendation 12: Strengthen the oversight of the educational service delivery function and develop two executive director positions to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of instructional coordinators and curriculum supervisors to identify and eliminate duplication and ambiguity, enhance coordination and synergy, and determine staffing needs to meet the students' instructional needs.**
- **Recommendation 13: Provide ongoing training for teachers on how to effectively implement and document the Response to Intervention process on each campus.**
- **Recommendation 14: Establish a special education services organizational structure that ensures that the district trains reading and mathematics teachers to reduce the number of students that take the modified state assessment, monitors the number of special education students that take the assessment, and takes corrective action if the number exceeds the federal limit.**
- **Recommendation 15: Develop and implement a professional development plan to include an evaluation component that meets the certification needs of district teachers.**
- **Recommendation 16: Evaluate the district's existing instructional technology infrastructure resources to determine the most efficient method to align teacher and campus technology support needs with the appropriate number and role of staff to effectively integrate technology into classroom instruction.**
- **Recommendation 17: Provide district teachers with complete training of the student behavior management model, educate teachers about the advantages of the system to gain buy-in, and require full implementation of the model consistently districtwide.**
- **Recommendation 18: Restructure the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) instructional program to assess individual student needs, track student progress toward specified academic goals, and follow up with students' home campuses to ensure continued success.**

- **Recommendation 19: Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the district's library services to determine the adequate level of funding, staff, and collection size required to meet the district's needs.**
- **Recommendation 20: Review the district's existing teacher attendance improvement strategies and address teacher absenteeism through a comprehensive and systemic attendance improvement plan of action.**
- **Recommendation 21: Develop and implement a formal procedure for the evaluation of the district's programs and initiatives to ensure that each program receives a regular evaluation; that the district administrators, staff, and the Board of Trustees receive the program evaluation results and recommendations; and that a timeline is established to report the evaluation's status and results.**

DETAILED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS

DeSoto ISD recognized the need and has worked to increase the number and range of educational programs aimed at increasing student engagement, enrollment, and preparation for and success in college, thus helping the district develop into a district of choice. The district has embarked on a project of establishing magnet academies in its schools, at all levels from elementary to high school. By opening academies at six of the elementary schools, all three middle schools and the high school levels, all academies could be aligned. The administration, with input from an advisory committee, met with the schools' principals, parents and students and decided on the types of magnet academies to open in each school based on an analysis of the schools' strengths and student interest. DeSoto ISD chose to have magnet academies in six of its seven elementary schools. Admittance to all magnet academies is by application, demonstration of high academic performance, and letters of recommendation. At the time of the onsite review, the number of students accepted to the elementary school magnet academy programs had not been determined. The middle school magnet academies will each have up to 150 students.

In school year 2013–14, DeSoto ISD opened its Collegiate Magnet Academy in collaboration with Cedar Valley College, using hybrid faculty from the college and the district. Collegiate Magnet Academy students could take 60 college hours and earn an Associate Degree. The academy began in school year 2013–14 with gifted students in the grades 9 and 10 and added grade 11 students in school year 2014–15 for an enrollment of 180 students. The Collegiate Magnet Academy is located on the DeSoto High School campus.

The district also opened an Early College High School in school year 2014–15 in collaboration with Cedar Valley College for students who are first generation college goers. The district received an Early College High School grant. The school is located in a separate wing of the DeSoto High School campus and has its own principal and counselor but shares some of its teachers with the Freshman Campus. In its first year of operation, the school had 98 students. The district provides the teachers with specialized training for early college high school. By the end of the first year, students could accrue six college credits. In their junior and senior years, the students would take most of their classes at the college.

The iSTEAM3D program that started in school year 2013–14 is an innovative program that integrates music, visual arts, drama, and dance and is implemented in each middle school for students in grades 6 to 8. The program is located in a dedicated part of the middle school campuses and uses the project-based learning approach in all core subjects, teaching to the grade 8 level. Project-based learning is an instructional approach through which students gain knowledge and skills by investigating for an extended period or responding to a complex question, problem or challenge. Students are able to gain greater and more in-depth understanding of concepts, broaden their knowledge base, improve their communication and interpersonal skills, enhance leadership skills, increase creativity, and improve writing. The district publicized the program through advertisements, a flyer and mail outs. Approximately 200 students applied to the program and about 150 were selected by lottery. The program has five teachers on each campus that received specialized professional development. The program adapted the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) Resource System (TRS) to fit the project-based learning instructional approach.

The district also established an International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program starting at the high school level with the goal of implementing it districtwide. IB is the flagship program of the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO). The IB program offers multiple advantages to its participants: the curriculum has a global perspective, transition to college is less challenging, and students earn college credit, increase scholarship opportunities, and have a

higher chance of being admitted to prestigious universities in the United States and throughout the world.

DeSoto ISD submitted an application to the IBO in school year 2013–14 for an IB program in DeSoto High School and received notice of acceptance for candidacy. The district is in its second year of candidacy with the goal for the DeSoto High School to become an IB World School, implementing the Diploma Program in September 2016 and preparing for its first exams in May 2018.

In school year 2012–13, DeSoto ISD started a two-way, dual-language program in prekindergarten to grade one. Sixty percent of the students in the program are native Spanish speakers, and 40 percent are native English speakers. Students receive 50 percent instruction in Spanish and 50 percent in English, but the languages are separate during instruction. Students gain exposure to both languages, allowing them to progress academically while becoming bilingual. The program addresses concerns of parents of Spanish speaking students who feared that their children do not learn enough English. The two-way, dual-language model has proven effective in improving long-term academic and linguistic achievement, as reflected in standardized test results in reading and mathematics of Spanish- and English-dominant students.

By offering this range of programs at all levels including high-performance options, the administration intends to change the district culture into a college-going culture and attract students who left the district and students from other districts, thereby increasing enrollment.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

DeSoto ISD has an exemplary Career and Technical Education (CTE) program with state-of-the-art facilities and equipment and extensive involvement of business and industry.

The district CTE program serves students in grades 9–12. In middle school, students take a career exploration class. Student enrollment in CTE has increased 42 percent from school years 2009–10 to 2013–14. **Figure 2–6** shows that in school year 2013–14, nearly 30 percent of the district's students are in CTE.

Figure 2–7 shows that the DeSoto ISD's CTE program offers courses in 15 areas of study and an array of courses responsive to student interests and employment opportunities.

FIGURE 2–6
DESOTO ISD STUDENTS IN CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAM
SCHOOL YEARS 2009–10 TO 2013–14

SCHOOL YEAR	ENROLLMENT	STUDENTS IN CTE	PERCENTAGE
2009–10	9,045	1,966	22%
2010–11	9,165	1,859	20%
2011–12	8,921	1,997	22%
2012–13	8,884	2,067	23%
2013–14	9,399	2,789	30%

SOURCES: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, school years 2009–10 to 2011–12, and Texas Academic Performance Reports, School Years 2012–13 to 2013–14.

FIGURE 2–7
DESOTO ISD CTE PROGRAMS OF STUDY AND STUDENT ENROLLMENT
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

PROGRAMS	ENROLLMENT
Agriculture	234
Automotive	158
Aviation	33
Business Management and Information Technology	1,124
Cosmetology	155
Culinary Arts	478
Diversified Career Preparation I and II	13
Education and Training	270
Human Services	144
Fashion Design	130
Health Science Technology	340
Law Enforcement	361
Marketing	46
Radio and Broadcasting	142
Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics	104

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, CTE Department, March 2015.

DeSoto ISD also offers a large number of dual credit courses through its articulation agreement with Cedar Valley College. In school year 2014–15, the district offered 13 dual credit courses including courses in Accounting, Automotive Technology, Business Computers Information Systems, Human Resources Management, Marketing, Business, and Business Management. The district also has memorandums of understanding for its health science program with the

Methodist Charleston Hospital and Williamsburg Senior Facility.

By implementing a comprehensive CTE program, DeSoto ISD is helping to prepare its students for successful futures.

DROPOUT PREVENTION AND DROPOUT RECOVERY

DeSoto ISD established the Where I Now Gain Success (WINGS) dropout prevention and dropout recovery program that has assisted more than 300 students to graduate from high school. The credit recovery and dropout recovery program started in school year 2010–11 with a $100,000 three-year dropout recovery grant from TEA. The district continued the program after the grant ended because it is highly effective. The program has strong board and community support. WINGS offers classes to 100 students ages 17 to 26. The program is at capacity and has a waiting list of 30 students.

The instructional program has an individual student focus and uses small group tutoring. The program does not advertise. The counselor interviews incoming students, reviews transcripts and monitors students' progress based on a timeline prepared for each student. All staff counsel and help students to develop a safe and supportive learning environment.

WINGS has a challenging student population. **Figure 2–8** shows that the student population attending this program includes students with a number of at-risk factors. In school year 2014–15, the program also had 28 special education students and 22 English Language Learners (ELLs). Eleven of the special education students, or 39 percent, are from the district while the others, about 60 percent, are from nearby districts or from out of state.

Since the program was established in school year 2010–11, approximately 80 percent of the students enrolled completed the program and graduated. Students are able to graduate in either January or May. The number of graduates more than quadrupled from 21 during the first year of the program to 108 in school year 2013–14. According to the WINGS coordinator, the program has graduated 310 students and is expected to surpass 400 by the May 2015 graduation.

GEAR UP GRANT

DeSoto ISD established a grant implementation infrastructure with services that provide teachers with resources to facilitate instruction and support promoting academic achievement and successful preparation of underserved students for college. As a result, DeSoto ISD was the only district in Texas that received the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) GEAR UP grant in 2014.

FIGURE 2–8
DESOTO ISD WINGS PROGRAM STUDENTS
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

AT-RISK FACTORS	STUDENTS
Student failed one or more courses	195
Student was not advanced from one grade level to the next for one or more school years	197
Student did not perform satisfactorily on an assessment -Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills or End of Course State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (TAKS or EOC-STAAR)	169
Student is pregnant or is a parent	26
Student was in alternative education program this year or previous year	55
Student has been expelled this year or previous year from a public school	19
Student is currently on parole, probation, deferred prosecution or other conditional release	38
Student was previously reported through Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) to have dropped out	51
Student has limited English proficiency	37
Student is in the custody or care of the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services or has been during the previous school year	17
Student is homeless	(1)
Student resided in the previous school year or resides this year in residential placement facility, detention facility, substance abuse treatment facility, psychiatric hospital, halfway house or foster group home	19

NOTE: (1) Numbers less than five have not been cited due to the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 34 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 99.1, and Texas Education Agency Operating Procedure 10–03.
SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, WINGS Program, February 2015.

DeSoto ISD's GEAR UP program provides highly collaborative coordinated services among schools, post-secondary institutions, and business and community organizations. **Figure 2–9** shows that the district's three middle schools, the Freshman Campus, and the high school participate in the grant in partnership with three institutions of higher learning, seven community organizations, and two private entities.

The purpose of the $7.8 million GEAR UP grant is to implement a comprehensive early intervention program that would establish a college-going culture that develops highly effective teachers, leaders, and communities of high-performing learners by increasing the academic achievement levels of under-represented, low-income, special needs and minority students and ensuring their preparedness and success in college and career. GEAR UP, according to the USDOE, has five objectives:

- increase the academic performance and preparation for post-secondary education for GEAR UP students;
- increase the rate of high school graduation and participation in post-secondary education for GEAR UP students;
- increase GEAR UP students' and their families' knowledge of post-secondary education options, preparation, and financing;
- increase GEAR UP students' access to advanced academic programs, technology applications and distance learning networks through a STEM initiative; and
- increase the leadership capacity of administrators and community stakeholders to sustain a college awareness organizational structure of continuous learning.

The seven-year grant provides services at middle schools and high schools with high economically disadvantaged student populations. It serves an entire cohort of students beginning no later than grade 7 and follows the cohort through high school. It includes both an early intervention component and

FIGURE 2–9
DESOTO ISD GEAR UP PARTNERS
JULY 2014

PARTICIPANTS	ROLE
University of Texas–Austin Texas A&M University–Prairie View Cedar Valley College	Provide leadership and college and career awareness, financial aid training, college visits, on site campus learning experiences, tutoring mentor and assist teachers, and retention services for first year college students.
Regional Education Service Center X	Provides professional development, instructional support and curriculum and pedagogical guidance, alignment and strategies, and help with Positive Behavior Interventions System.
Princeton Review	Professional development to teachers on Advanced Placement teaching and learning strategies. Student activities to build skills in Advanced Placement courses, college-level work, and college admissions tests ACT and SAT.
SureScore	Provides Campus2Career programming, tutoring, instruction and professional development in content area, ACT and SAT test preparation and college and career planning.
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Edge	Technology platform for online tutoring, mentoring and counseling. Targets struggling students.
Career Cruising	Provide college preparation and testing, training to teachers, tools for students and parents.
Solar Turbines	Provides science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) professional development to math and science teachers. Offers workshops, internships and job shadowing to expose students to STEM technology.
Texas Alliance of Black School Educators (TABSE)	In collaboration with the district, TABSE offers Leadership and Life Skills training to students to accelerate academic college preparation. Trains parents on leadership, career pathways, college fit and financial literacy.
Texas Instruments	Provides professional development and online technical support in use of Nspire calculators and technology for math and science content.
Educational Grants and Information Youth Link	Offers in Year 7 cohort college students online enhanced academic and personal advising, mentoring, tutoring, and guidance to support college retention and success.

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, GEAR UP Grant Application, July 2014.

a scholarship component designed to increase college attendance and success and raise the expectations of economically disadvantaged students.

DeSoto ISD started to implement the grant in school year 2014–15. **Figure 2–10** shows that DeSoto ISD developed a comprehensive grant implementation infrastructure.

The GEAR UP grant program addresses academic preparation for college through rigorous coursework, project-based learning, enrichment activities, academic mentoring and tutoring, and comprehensive guidance and advising. The GEAR UP program offers students college and career readiness initiatives such as iSTEAM3D and participation in the College and Career Academies.

By implementing the GEAR UP program, DeSoto ISD is demonstrating to the students and community stakeholders that the district is committed to preparing every student for college and beyond.

DETAILED FINDINGS

CURRICULUM (REC. 9)

DeSoto ISD lacks a process to fully implement the curriculum management system (CMS) to ensure that students learn with consistent pacing, fidelity, and rigor.

DeSoto ISD uses the TEKS TRS as the district's CMS. TRS is a comprehensive CMS built on research-based practices in the field and aligned to the State Board of Education-adopted TEKS. It covers the four core subjects in kindergarten to

FIGURE 2–10
DESOTO ISD GEAR UP GRANT IMPLEMENTATION INFRASTRUCTURE
JULY 2014

POSITION	FREQUENCY	ROLE
Executive Team: executive from each partner organization, the project director, superintendent, assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools, the University of Texas–Austin	Meet monthly in Year 1, Quarterly thereafter	Establish/review grant policies, administration, budgets, contracts, program changes, and evaluation results.
Steering Committee: representative from each partner organization, assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools, project director, principals, teachers, parents, and community members	Quarterly	Review and provide oversight, support, planning, coordination, guidance and monitoring of progress on objectives, activities, student outcomes, and program operations.
Project Director	Full-time	Responsible for overall project and budget management, lead the GEAR UP team, work with all partners and evaluator, and be liaison to the U.S. Department of Education GEAR UP Office.
Program Assistant	Full-time	Provide support to Project Director and staff.
Lead Content Coach	Full-time	Serve as coach/mentor to campus teachers, provide training and technical assistance, follow cohort students through their first year of college, and provide intense academic support and guidance.
Family/Financial Advocate	Full-time	Provide training and technical assistance to parents and students.
Information Technology Lead	Full-time	Provide training and technical assistance through the integration and use of technology.
School Site Coordinators (3)	Full-time	Coordinate all school activities including tutoring, extended academic activities, college counseling, parent training, enrollment in advanced placement and dual-credit classes, professional development, after school programs, college readiness, financial literacy, and GEAR UP events.
Teachers/Tutors (10)	Part-time	Tutor students in the classroom, online, before and after school, and during the summer; mentor students.
Parent Council	Meet quarterly	Assist in strategic planning, serve as advocates of the program to the community.
Evaluation, Grants, and Training (EGT) Institute	Annually	Serves as external evaluator. Evaluate the grant: track students, analyze data, and prepare evaluation report.

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, GEAR UP Grant Application, July 2014.

grade 12 and Spanish language arts and reading in kindergarten to grade 5. This system provides a common language, structure, and process for curriculum development. The system's design accompanies the district-approved instructional materials and is customizable to meet the needs of individual students. The district's CMS has the following components:

- Vertical Alignment Document (VAD) and TEKS Clarification Document;
- Year At-a-Glance (YAG) and TEKS Verification Document;
- Instructional Focus Document (IFD);
- Performance Assessments and Sample Unit Assessments; and a
- TEKS Resource System Website.

DeSoto ISD is in its fifth year of using this CMS. Initially, the district did not make the use of this system mandatory. Each campus had a great degree of autonomy with regard to curriculum implementation, instructional practices and resources. There was no system to monitor use and fidelity of implementation. While the current administration made the use of this system mandatory, the district still faces implementation and monitoring challenges. According to the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools, about 85 percent of the teachers use the system. **Figure 2–11** shows the results of a survey of 329 DeSoto ISD teachers related to curriculum guides. Only 61 percent of the district's teachers consider the curriculum guides to be effective tools.

The elementary schools use the CMS the most. The middle schools use the system less than the elementary schools and the high schools use it the least. The greatest degree of teacher buy-in as it relates to the curriculum is at the elementary school level. According to the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools, the high school teachers use it with the least consistency.

Teachers at the elementary and secondary levels still find the curriculum management system challenging. Some of the difficulties teachers across all grade levels experience in using the system stems from their insufficient knowledge of the system and a lack of training in using the system. Another area of difficulty teachers experience is associated with the need to develop lesson plans. While the previous version of the curriculum system had lesson plans, the existing version does not. The lack of lesson plans results in significant difficulties for new teachers. In school year 2013–14, 13.0 percent, or 72, of DeSoto ISD's teachers were new.

Another complaint by teachers is that the lessons and assessments do not align. Typically, non-alignment is a result of teachers not covering all pertinent components of a CMS. Another impact to curriculum alignment is the CMS is less effective when teachers use supplemental resources that do not align with the district's system and lack the required level of rigor. Classroom observations conducted by central office instructional staff showed that teachers still use lessons that are not rigorous. Although campus instructional coordinators scheduled assessment reviews to ensure that teachers were familiar with the assessments when they planned their lessons, not all teachers attended the sessions and the sessions did not occur in a consistent manner. The district has initiated a more structured process in school year 2014–15 to address teacher reviews of the assessment.

Teachers are not taking full advantage of the different components of the CMS or of the key benefits the system offers, such as alignment and rigor. For example, the Curriculum and Instruction Department encouraged teachers to post in their classroom YAG information showing how many TEKS they have to cover. However, the district abandoned the effort since teachers did not post the information. Teachers do not take advantage of the information included in the Vertical Alignment Document (VAD) that shows the information covered in the current and next grades, giving teachers a longer view. They also have not fully used the Performance Assessments, a critical component of the system that provides evidence of mastery.

FIGURE 2–11
DESOTO ISD TEACHER SURVEY RESULTS
FEBRUARY 2015

CURRICULUM GUIDES ARE EFFECTIVE TOOLS					
	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Teachers	14%	47%	22%	13%	4%

NOTE: Totals may not sum due to rounding.
SOURCE: Legislative Budget, Board School Review Team, February 2015.

According to elementary school principals, although teachers lack adequate training on the CMS and on teaching with rigorous strategies, teachers appreciate the specificity and depth of the system and consider the performance indicators helpful. However according to teachers, pacing is a challenge as the system does not allow enough time to cover the readiness standards and to re-teach, an activity that elementary school teachers perform often. Teachers also complained about the lack of alignment between the common assessments and the TEKS and between the campus testing periods and the system timelines.

At the middle school level, teachers found that the common assessment might not address the materials taught. As a result, some teachers have stopped using the system's scope and sequence. Teachers still need help in organizing the range of resources the system specifies, knowing where to find the resources and practice sheets, knowing how to use them, and aligning them with the common assessments.

At the Freshman Campus, not all teachers have embraced the CMS. Although teachers use the IFD and YAG components of the system, they do not use these with fidelity, according to the principal. Alignment of TEKS and assessments is still an issue, as teachers do not always cover the entire system, due to lack of in-depth system knowledge.

Pacing is still an issue across all content areas. It is especially challenging in math and science. Teachers indicated that the algebra component is too advanced for students: the wording is too challenging and the pace is too fast. For courses that are too hard for students, teachers use textbooks rather than the system resources. Similarly, in biology, teachers adjust the pace and rigor. Some of the system courses, such as Biology I, do not align with the assessments.

The school year 2014–15 District Improvement Plan and Campus Improvement Plans addressed the CMS implementation in a limited way. As part of Goal 1, raising student achievement, the DIP indicates training all teachers on rigor. As part of Goal 2, improving the quality of instruction, the DIP includes two strategies: providing staff development to all staff on mandatory components of the CMS and having principals, assistant principals, instructional coordinators, and supervisors conduct weekly walkthroughs. A review of a sample of elementary, middle, and high school campus improvement plans (CIPs) showed variance in addressing the curriculum system and associated fidelity and rigor issues. For example, the school year 2014–15 Amber Terrace Elementary CIP identified an objective for Goal 1, raising student achievement strategies, analyzing Common Assessment questions for rigor and conducting biweekly assessments aligned to the system. For Goal 2, improving the quality of instruction, the CIP's strategy is for the instructional team to meet with teachers to increase rigor of instruction and academic achievement. The school year 2014–15 East Middle School CIP addresses the CMS in Goal 2, improving the quality of instruction, which stipulates that the system should be followed consistently in all core subjects and all grade levels and that staff are properly trained on rigor. The CIP also includes provisions to ensure alignment with state standards and to ensure expectations of rigor are integrated into all six-week pedagogical practices. It also has strategies to improve the effectiveness of teacher and administrator walkthroughs and observations. The Freshman Campus CIP specifies only a single strategy of training all teachers on rigor. The DeSoto High School CIP does not include any strategies associated with the curriculum or with rigor and fidelity of implementation. Given that the district currently has an Improvement Required TEA rating, the lack of any strategy with respect to curriculum and the CIP would make it difficult for the district to improve its rating.

Implementing the CMS with fidelity, rigor and pacing are still issues at all three schools. While the district has increased its monitoring, provides immediate feedback at the end of walkthroughs and holds teachers accountable to a greater extent than previously, consistent implementation has not yet taken hold. The district implemented a system, Tribe, for walkthroughs to observe and monitor instruction in the classrooms. The Tribe is a team of instructional support center staff conducting classroom walkthroughs to collect and report data and debrief principals following each campus visit. The Tribe does walkthroughs in all campuses throughout the year. Some of the Tribe's objectives included establishing a common understanding of effective classroom instruction, helping monitor and support effective teaching, developing trust with teachers through a focused and fair walkthrough, engaging in reflection and collaboration, and developing and aligning professional development. The Tribe walkthrough system did not prove to be effective. Principals' knowledge of the CMS has not been high. Not all principals and assistant principals knew how to determine whether a teacher follows the curriculum system. Principals did not focus on the system Performance Assessments, which show mastery. For example, elementary school teachers did not consider the Tribe walkthrough system helpful as they objected to its focus on negatives and to the composition of the Tribe teams conducting the walkthroughs as some members were not knowledgeable about instructional practice. They also

considered the duration of the walkthroughs-five-minutes-too short to be representative of their teaching and not sufficient for the team to draw any conclusions.

Figure 2–12 shows DeSoto ISD's student performance on state assessments. DeSoto ISD lagged behind the state and Region 10 in all core subjects and overall in school years 2012–13 and 2013–14. DeSoto ISD also lagged considerably behind the state and Region 10 in percentages of students who passed the EOC exams.

Effective districts use a series of strategies to generate teacher buy-in and consistent implementation of the CMS from the start. When a district decides to adopt the system, district leaders communicate a sense of urgency in support of immediate implementation. First, the district helps teachers connect their instructional practices to the new system through a series of activities. These activities identify the optional and mandatory components of the system. Components first introduced as optional are gradually mandated. This allows teachers to become familiar with the system's components and build buy-in. Districts also provide continuous training on the system to teachers and administrators. The training is both districtwide and campus based. These districts require curriculum supervisors to visit campuses, make classroom observations and discuss pacing and assessments with teachers. Further, the districts customize the CMS to district and teacher needs by using curriculum maps comparing the new system to the district's scope and sequence; helping to build teacher support. During the summer, effective districts require teachers to review curriculum pacing and test scores and to determine which standards need more time and emphasis in classroom teaching. The district monitors implementation using instructional teams to conduct walkthroughs to observe student engagement, best practices, and ensure objectives align with the scope and sequence and with the materials and resources used. The teams prepare for each visit by reviewing student performance data, identifying areas of concern, and selecting classrooms for observation. The team offers immediate feedback to teachers and administrators before they leave the campus. Principals and assistant principals also do walkthroughs looking for consistency in implementation, rigor, alignment of objectives with the curriculum, and student engagement and learning. The district makes resources available for implementation, such as aligned reading materials, supplies for science experiments and paper to print curriculum documents.

Luling ISD uses five district level leadership responsibilities that significantly correlate with student achievement. The five district level leadership responsibilities include the establishment of goal setting processes, identification of

FIGURE 2–12
DESOTO ISD STATE OF TEXAS ASSESSMENTS OF ACADEMIC READINESS (STAAR) ALL GRADES AND END-OF-COURSE EXAMS BY CORE SUBJECT COMPARED TO REGION 10 AND STATE SCHOOL YEARS 2012–13 TO 2013–14

	STATE		REGION 10		DESOTO	
	2012–13	2013–14	2012–13	2013–14	2012–13	2013–14
STAAR						
All Subjects	77%	77%	79%	78%	**65%**	**64%**
Reading	80%	76%	82%	78%	**71%**	**64%**
Math	79%	78%	81%	78%	**67%**	**62%**
Writing	63%	72%	65%	74%	**48%**	**67%**
Science	82%	78%	84%	80%	**69%**	**66%**
Social Studies	76%	76%	79%	80%	**63%**	**61%**
END OF COURSE						
English/Reading I	(1)	67%	(1)	69%	**(1)**	**47%**
English/Reading II	(1)	69%	(1)	71%	**(1)**	**47%**
Algebra I	78%	80%	79%	81%	**62%**	**67%**
Biology	84%	89%	87%	90%	**73%**	**80%**
U.S. History	(1)	92%	(1)	92%	**(1)**	**79%**

NOTE: No end-of-course exam given in school year 2012–13.
SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Reports, school years 2012–13 to 2013–14.

optional and mandatory goals for achievement and instruction, ensuring broad support of district goals, monitoring for achievement and instruction, and allocating resources to support achievement and instructional goals. Luling ISD's Board of Trustees mandated the adoption of the curriculum and the district administration developed a Curriculum Implementation Document that specified expected levels of implementation at all grade levels and an associated timeline for each. The document expects all teachers to implement the curriculum, gives principals the responsibility for monitoring implementation, and charges teachers working with support teams with analyzing student performance data to respond to student needs through re-teaching or other strategies.

DeSoto ISD should conduct a systematic review of curriculum management system implementation and monitoring districtwide; identify areas at each campus where implementation does not meet criteria such as consistent pacing, fidelity and rigor; and identify best practice strategies to address these areas.

The assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools, jointly with the curriculum supervisors and representatives of the elementary, middle school and high schools, the principals and instructional coordinators should develop a checklist representing the CMS implementation and monitoring process. The checklist should be comprehensive and cover all components of the system, define the necessary evidence of consistent implementation, appropriate pacing, resources to use, and implementation characteristics that represent rigor and fidelity. Three teams should be involved: one for elementary, one for middle and one for high school. The teams should assess implementation at each campus, review campus assessment data and walkthrough and monitoring data. All team members should receive training in the review methodology to ensure consistency across members and across teams. Following the review of implementation at each campus, the team should use the checklist, supporting evidence, assessment data and walkthrough and monitoring documentation to prepare a campus report identifying where the CMS implementation needs further support. For each area of needed support, the report should specify the type of support needed and the type of monitoring needed. The campus reports should be aggregated overall for the district and by level – elementary, middle and high – to identify common areas of support. Based on the aggregation results, the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools and team participants should develop district and campus support plans, specify available resources, develop timelines, and identify monitoring strategies.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

GRADUATION RATES (REC. 10)

DeSoto ISD lacks a system that ensures that students remain in school, resulting in a low graduation rate and a high dropout rate.

DeSoto ISD does not have a system to monitor and track students who are failing academically, are failing in more than one subject, are behind in their credits, or have a large number of absences, and are therefore at risk of not completing high school or dropping out. While the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) clerk provides monthly reports on at-risk students, the district does not have a database to keep track of the interventions implemented with each of these students and the progress these students have made. Teachers and counselors meet at the end of each grading period with students who performed poorly academically. However, the assistance provided to students may not be based on individually tailored strategies or involve the range of resources needed. The district does not track these students individually to determine whether the assistance they receive is sufficient or effective. Although the counselors review data on high school completion and dropout rates, the district has not developed a system to address these or assigned a staff member to oversee the district's efforts.

Low academic performance and high retention rates lead to low graduation rates, high dropout rates and less on-time completion of high school. **Figure 2–13** shows that DeSoto ISD's graduation rates have ranged between a low of 80 percent in school year 2010–11 to a high of 84 percent in school year 2013–14. DeSoto ISD has lagged behind Region 10 and state graduation rates since school year 2009–10. DeSoto ISD's dropout rates were lower than the regional and state rates in school years 2009–10 but surpassed the regional and statewide dropout rates in school years 2011–12, 2012–13, and 2013–14. The percentage of students who did not graduate in four years (percent continued high school) was higher than the regional and statewide percentages since school year 2009–10.

Figure 2–14 shows that in school year 2013–14, DeSoto ISD had the lowest graduation rate among its peers and the

FIGURE 2–13
DESOTO ISD GRADUATION, DROPOUT AND HIGH SCHOOL CONTINUATION RATES
SCHOOL YEARS 2009–10 TO 2013–14

	2009–10	2010–11 (1)	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14
Graduated					
DeSoto	**82%**	**83%**	**80%**	**84%**	**81%**
Region 10	80%	84%	(2)	88%	88%
State	81%	84%	(2)	88%	88%
Dropped Out					
DeSoto	**7%**	**7%**	**9%**	**8%**	**8%**
Region 10	10%	7%	(2)	6%	7%
State	9%	8%	(2)	6%	7%
Continued High School					
DeSoto	**8%**	**9%**	**9%**	**7%**	**10%**
Region 10	10%	8%	(2)	5%	6%
State	9%	7%	(2)	5%	5%

NOTES:
(1) Graduation rates for 2010–11 were calculated without exclusions.
(2) No information available.
SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, school years 2009–10 to 2011–12, and Texas Academic Performance Reports, school years 2012–13 to 2013–14.

second highest dropout rate. Peer districts are Texas school districts similar to DeSoto ISD that are used for comparison purposes. DeSoto ISD's graduation rate was 5 to 14 percentage points lower than its peers' graduation rates. DeSoto ISD also had a larger percentage of its students not graduate in four years.

Academic performance is a key indicator of graduation. DeSoto ISD student performance on state assessments lags behind state and regional performance. **Figure 2–15** shows DeSoto ISD student performance data for school year 2013–14. In school year 2013–14, DeSoto ISD's students were below state and regional performance in all grade levels and subjects (with the exception of grade 8 reading). On grade 8 assessments, students lagged behind the state by 16 percentage points in math and science and 18 percentage points in social studies. DeSoto ISD's high school students lagged behind state averages by 9 (biology) to 22 percentage points (English/reading II). They lagged behind Region 10 average overall performance by 10 to 24 percentage points. In school year 2013–14, TEA rated four schools, including one elementary, two middle, and the high school, with an Improvement Required accountability rating.

Figure 2–16 shows that DeSoto ISD student performance lags in preparation for postsecondary education in all subject areas. The district performance was 11 to 21 percentage points less than the state rates and 15 to 27 percentage points less than Region 10 averages.

DeSoto ISD has a high retention rate in grade 9, as students do not have enough credits to earn promotion to grade 10. Between school years 2010–11 and 2012–13, the percentage of grade 9 students retained increased from 14.0 percent in school year 2010–11 to 23.0 percent in school year 2012–13, an increase of 60.4 percent in grade 9 retentions. Similarly, the district retained between 7.0 and 12.0 percent of grade 10 students. Retention of grade 11 students ranged from 3.0 to 11.0 percent. Retention of grade 12 students ranged from 6.0 to 8.0 percent. The percentage of students retained at grades 11 and 12 decreased from school years 2010–11 to 2012–13. **Figure 2–17** shows DeSoto ISD's retention rate percentages by grade from school years 2010–11 to 2012–13.

Research has shown that not graduating from high school contributes to the risk of economic, social, and personal challenges. Schools with low levels of promotion in all high school grades tend to have high levels of students in poverty and a lack of resources suggesting that school-based solutions including a dedicated application of resources could reduce dropouts. Majority minority schools with high resources

FIGURE 2–14
DESOTO ISD PEER DISRICTS, REGION 10, AND STATE GRADUATION, DROPOUT AND HIGH SCHOOL CONTINUATION OVERALL AND BY SUBPOPULATION
SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14

	ALL STUDENTS	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE	SPECIAL EDUCATION
DeSoto ISD					
Graduated	**81%**	**86%**	**66%**	**60%**	**75%**
Dropped Out	**8%**	**6%**	**15%**	**21%**	**10%**
Continued High School	**10%**	**8%**	**19%**	**17%**	**16%**
Cedar Hill ISD					
Graduated	91%	92%	85%	90%	72%
Dropped Out	6%	5%	10%	7%	12%
Continued High School	3%	3%	6%	4%	16%
Sharyland ISD					
Graduated	95%	(1)	95%	93%	94%
Dropped Out	2%	(1)	2%	2%	0%
Continued High School	3%	(1)	2%	5%	6%
Temple ISD					
Graduated	87%	82%	87%	91%	81%
Dropped Out	10%	16%	9%	5%	10%
Continued High School	2%	1%	2%	3%	10%
Region 10					
Graduated	88%	83%	84%	93%	77%
Dropped Out	7%	10%	8%	3%	11%
Continued High School	6%	7%	8%	3%	12%
State					
Graduated	88%	84%	85%	93%	78%
Dropped Out	7%	10%	8%	4%	11%
Continued High School	5%	5%	6%	3%	11%

NOTE: (1) Numbers less than five have not been cited due to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 34 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 99.1, and Texas Education Agency Operating Procedure 10–03.
SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Reports, school year 2013–14.

successfully promote students to a senior status at the same rate as majority White schools. Effective districts facilitate an inclusive school community through the new 3Rs in education: having a strong Relationship with one or more adults in the school, understanding the Relevance of what they are learning, and being challenged by a Rigorous curriculum. The 3Rs encourage students to stay in school and graduate. The absence of one or more of these factors plays a key role in students leaving school before graduation.

Effective interventions that promote staying in school and graduating typically focus on improving both academic performance and non-academic skills. Districts can implement these interventions schoolwide and for individual students. Improving academic performance strategies include

FIGURE 2–15
DESOTO ISD STUDENT PERFORMANCE ON STATE OF TEXAS ASSESSMENTS OF ACADEMIC READINESS (STAAR) AND END-OF-COURSE EXAMS BY GRADE AND STUDENT SUBPOPULATION COMPARED TO REGION 10 AND STATE
SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14

	STATE	REGION 10	DESOTO	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
Grade 3						
Reading	76%	77%	**68%**	67%	69%	79%
Math	71%	72%	**57%**	58%	52%	71%
Grade 4						
Reading	74%	75%	**69%**	69%	65%	93%
Math	71%	71%	**55%**	52%	58%	93%
Writing	73%	74%	**68%**	68%	66%	86%
Grade 5						
Reading	86%	88%	**81%**	82%	79%	75%
Math	88%	89%	**84%**	84%	83%	81%
Science	74%	74%	**55%**	53%	62%	65%
Grade 6						
Reading	78%	79%	**66%**	66%	71%	59%
Math	79%	80%	**53%**	52%	57%	53%
Grade 7						
Reading	76%	77%	**63%**	62%	68%	50%
Math	68%	70%	**49%**	46%	63%	45%
Writing	72%	73%	**66%**	67%	65%	45%
Grade 8						
Reading	90%	91%	**91%**	91%	88%	90%
Math	86%	86%	**70%**	69%	75%	79%
Science	72%	75%	**56%**	54%	61%	63%
Social Studies	63%	68%	**45%**	44%	46%	61%
End of Course						
English/Reading I	67%	69%	**47%**	48%	45%	45%
English/Reading II	69%	71%	**47%**	46%	52%	38%
Algebra I	80%	81%	**67%**	67%	63%	65%
Biology	89%	90%	**80%**	81%	77%	77%
U.S. History	92%	94%	**79%**	79%	79%	82%
All Grades						
Reading	76%	78%	**64%**	63%	65%	64%
Math	78%	78%	**62%**	61%	63%	68%
Writing	72%	74%	**67%**	67%	65%	61%
Science	78%	80%	**66%**	65%	68%	69%
Social Studies	76%	80%	**61%**	61%	60%	69%
All Subjects	77%	78%	**64%**	63%	65%	66%

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Reports, Phase-in Satisfactory Standard or Above, school year 2013–14.

FIGURE 2–16
DESOTO ISD STUDENT POST–SECONDARY READINESS BY CORE AREA AND STUDENT SUBPOPULATION COMPARED TO REGION 10 AND STATE
SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14

	STATE	REGION 10	DESOTO	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
Two or More Subjects	41%	44%	**21%**	20%	25%	30%
Reading	45%	48%	**30%**	29%	30%	36%
Math	39%	42%	**19%**	18%	26%	25%
Writing	35%	39%	**24%**	24%	27%	22%
Science	43%	46%	**23%**	21%	27%	38%
Social Studies	39%	44%	**17%**	16%	20%	35%

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Reports, school year 2013–14.

FIGURE 2–17
DESOTO ISD RETENTION RATES BY GRADE
SCHOOL YEARS 2010–11 TO 2012–13

GRADE	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13
Kindergarten	4.0%	4.0%	2.0%
1	7.0%	6.0%	5.0%
2	6.0%	5.0%	2.0%
3	6.0%	4.0%	5.0%
4	2.0%	2.0%	3.0%
5	2.0%	2.0%	3.0%
6	0.3%	0.6%	0.3%
7	0.7%	2.0%	0.4%
8	1.1%	0.5%	0.6%
9	14.0%	16.0%	23.0%
10	12.0%	7.0%	12.0%
11	8.0%	11.0%	3.0%
12	8.0%	7.0%	6.0%
Total	**5.0%**	**5.0%**	**5.0%**

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Accountability Research Unit, school years 2010–11 to 2012–13.

intensive instruction in the core subjects, personalized instruction or tutoring and improving studying and test-taking skills. Effective strategies for the development of non-academic skills include improving specific behaviors associated with problem-solving skills, social interaction, and decision making by promoting close relationships with caring adults through mentoring, pairing students with counselors who regularly meet with them, or placing at-risk students in smaller classrooms that allow a more personalized learning environment. On a schoolwide basis, these interventions include smaller classes, more personalized instruction, establishing close relationships between students and adults, improving non-academic behaviors, and academic enrichment. These strategies tend to increase student engagement in school and make school more relevant to future work and career options. An additional practice that promotes high school graduation is high-quality intensive early education programs that promote school readiness.

DeSoto ISD should develop and implement a comprehensive system to monitor and track student data to implement strategies to improve graduation rates and reduce dropout rates.

The monitoring and tracking system should have two components: a system to monitor and track at-risk students and a system to track and assess the effectiveness of programs implemented to improve graduation rates and reduce dropout.

The director of innovative programs should develop a system to monitor and track students at risk of not completing high school or dropping out. The director should assign a counselor in each of the middle and high schools to be the at-risk coordinator. The system should include students who did not pass state assessments, who are failing in more than one subject, who are behind in their credits, or who have a large number of absences. The system should define monitoring and tracking information, and specify frequency, strategies, resources, and reports. Monitoring should involve the type of interventions implemented, the teacher and counselor involved in the intervention, the resources accessed, and the dates of intervention. The district should base tracking on a periodic assessment of students' progress and use additional interventions and resources, if the student's progress did not meet set goals. The system should generate periodic reports on each student. The at-risk

coordinators should review the reports to determine the need for additional interventions.

The DeSoto ISD assistant superintendent for student support services, school improvement, and middles schools and the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools should identify academic and non-academic programs and strategies for improving graduation rates based on best practices. Based on the programs and strategies identified, the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools should develop a matrix aligning the best practice/effective programs and strategies identified with the programs and strategies that the district is already implementing. This matrix would help identify gaps where the district does not have any programs or strategies. For the areas with gaps, the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools should review the best practice/effective programs and strategies and decide which of those the district should implement. The assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools should develop an implementation plan for each of the new programs and strategies in consideration, including timelines for implementation, administrators/staff responsible for implementation, resources needed, impact on existing programs, and estimated costs. The implementation plan should include an evaluation component with performance and outcome measures. The district should evaluate the programs and strategies that the district is already implementing to expand program choice, increase student engagement, and increase instructional rigor to determine whether and to what extent these programs and strategies are achieving expected outcomes and how the district could improve them. Based on the analyses, the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools should develop a DeSoto ISD Graduation Rate Improvement Matrix, which lists all programs and strategies the district has been implementing or is starting to implement, their goals, expected outcomes, target populations, resources, milestone dates, staff overseeing each, and their effectiveness. This matrix would help the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools monitor implementation and evaluate the effectiveness of each program and strategy. The matrix would also be helpful in coordinating and streamlining these efforts, reducing duplication, and facilitating efficient implementation.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

WORLD LANGUAGES PROGRAM (REC. 11)

DeSoto ISD's World Languages program lacks a fully developed curriculum, instructional consistency within and across grade levels, and formalized coordination among teachers.

DeSoto ISD middle and high schools have implemented a World Languages program. The district has one Spanish language teacher in each of the three middle schools and four Spanish language teachers at the Freshman Campus. There are five Spanish language teachers and one French teacher at DeSoto High School. The middle schools offer Spanish I. The Freshman Campus offers Spanish I, Spanish for Native Speakers, and Spanish II. The high school offers Spanish I, II, III, IV; Spanish II pre-advanced placement, Spanish III pre-advanced placement, Spanish for Native Speakers, and Spanish V Literature/Culture.

In summer 2013, Region 10 helped DeSoto ISD develop a curriculum framework. The curriculum framework developers consisted of a Region 10 facilitator, a middle school teacher, and a high school teacher. The district updated the curriculum framework in a staff development session in fall 2013. The curriculum framework does not include an assessment of the adequate number of curriculum coordinators to meet the needs of the district or a timeline for implementation and does not align with TEA's Languages Other Than English (LOTE) standards. Teachers indicated that the curriculum is not fully developed, is not sufficiently rigorous or is too basic for the teaching level. The World Languages program does not have a formal operational structure to coordinate and monitor instruction across the five campuses. Organizationally, the program is aligned under the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance and elementary schools, although the program is a middle and high school program. The teachers are autonomous in how they conduct the program with limited, informal coordination.

The DeSoto ISD World Languages program is not implemented with consistency in or across grade levels and schools. Teachers use a variety of materials and other instructional resources. Teachers use the Realidades textbooks and a variety of websites such as phschool.com, conjuguemos.com, Quizlet.com, and LearnSpanish.com. Teachers also use materials acquired from advanced placement program (AP) workshops, foreign language summits, colleagues, or develop their own materials. Teachers conduct their own assessments because these evaluations are not included in the curriculum framework. Individual teachers either develop their own

assessments or coordinate to develop assessments. Some of the teachers post the assessments they develop online so that other teachers can use them if needed. The assessments teachers develop are not monitored or evaluated for quality and validity. Because the curriculum framework does not have timelines, each teacher teaches at his or her own pace. Teachers in the district said that they consider the lack of consensus with regard to timelines and pacing their biggest challenge. Teachers use different approaches to decide how long to teach a topic and how to teach it. For example, one teacher uses the school calendar to estimate the time for covering a subject. The teachers communicate occasionally about where they are in the teaching cycle. They also share lesson plans, assessments, and resources.

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) specifies characteristics of effective foreign language programs, including:

- having goals that are consistent with the amount of time available for instruction;
- the curriculum is standards and performance based;
- an extended sequence consisting of a well-articulated sequence of carefully developed curricula extending to grade 12 that allows students to develop increased language proficiency and cultural competence;
- articulation that is both vertical and horizontal allowing students to achieve outcomes that are consistent across grade levels;
- alignment from one level to the next that is teacher and textbook independent enhances equity and consistency of instruction across classrooms and schools;
- language instruction is implemented within a cultural content to reinforce the explicit connection between culture and language.
- availability of resources for systematic curriculum development and set cycles for curriculum review and updating;
- formative assessments;
- careful planning and monitoring;
- instruction is consistent with program outcomes and current professional practices;
- the program is staffed by certified teachers who have completed preparation in the subject;
- teachers have access to appropriate professional development; and
- the program evaluates student achievement and program goals, objectives and instructional strategies, and outcomes.

ACTFL's The Keys to Planning for Learning: Effective Curriculum, Unit, and Lessons Design, is a systematic guide for developing units and lesson plans. **Figure 2–18** shows an example template of a curriculum module that includes the components of the curriculum.

DeSoto ISD should strengthen the formal instructional and operational structure of the World Languages program through the development of Spanish, French, and other needed foreign languages, consistent assessments, and use of resources, and place the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools as the program's supervisor.

The district should ensure that the World Languages program participates in the Region 10 initiative of developing curricula aligned with the LOTE standards. The district should fully develop, articulate, and align the curriculum and include a timeline, units of study, sample lesson plans, supplemental materials, resources including technology, and formative assessments. The district should ensure that the World Languages program trains teachers in the use of the curriculum, provides support and monitors implementation in the classroom. DeSoto ISD should formalize the World Languages program with a coordinator who oversees the program across the five campuses. The district should identify an experienced teacher who has shown leadership and administrative capabilities to serve as the program coordinator. This coordinator should report to the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools. The assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools supervises the program (see the District Organization, Leadership, and Management chapter for a recommended reorganization that affects this recommendation). Additionally, the department chair should evaluate the needs of the program across the five campuses and develop a formal operational structure to coordinate and monitor instruction across the campuses. The department should reinforce consistent assessments, materials and resources at each grade level, and monitor campus and classroom implementation. The department should develop a program evaluation system and evaluate the program annually.

FIGURE 2–18
EXAMPLE TEMPLATE OF CURRICULUM MODULE
2013

	Approximate Length (weeks):		
Language and Level/Grade:	Approximate Number of Minutes Weekly:		
Theme/Topic:			
Essential Question:			
Goals:			
Summative Performance Assessment:	Interpretative Mode:	Presentational Mode:	Interpersonal Mode:
	Product:		
Cultures:	Practice:		
	Perspective:		
	Making Connections:		
Connections:	Social Studies:	Acquiring Information and Diverse Perspectives:	
	English Language Arts:		
Comparisons:	Language comparisons:	Cultural Comparison:	
Communities:	School and Global Communities:	Lifelong Learning:	
Toolbox:			
Language Functions:	Related Structures/Patterns	Vocabulary Expansion:	
Key learning Activities/Formative Assessments:			
Resources:	Technology Integration:		

SOURCE: Donna Clement and Laura Terrill, *The Keys to Planning for Learning: Effective Curriculum, Unit, and Lesson Design*, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2013.

This fiscal impact assumes the district would pay a stipend to the teacher assigned program coordinator responsibilities. Based on an analysis of salaries in neighboring and peer districts, this recommendation assumes a $1,500 annual fiscal impact for the increased responsibilities related to the coordinator position.

INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT (REC. 12)

DeSoto ISD lacks a system that clearly defines the role of the instructional support function to meet teachers' needs, including the roles of the instructional coordinators and curriculum supervisors.

The district's elementary, middle, and high school campuses report to separate district administrators. Each campuses instructional coordinator reports to the campus principal. The instructional support staff is made up of an instructional coordinator for each campus and four core area curriculum supervisors. The curriculum supervisors have higher academic degrees and more years of experience than the instructional coordinators. Both positions have "Instructional and Program Management" responsibilities and work to enhance instruction and assist struggling teachers.

The instructional coordinators and curriculum supervisors fulfill a key academic role in the district. The school year 2014–15 DeSoto ISD District Improvement Plan (DIP) identifies the instructional coordinators as instrumental to raising student achievement. The DIP includes instructional coordinators in 10 of the 13 performance objectives associated with the district's Goal 1: raising student achievement. The strategies these coordinators are responsible for monitoring involve the identification of students for interventions, tutoring, training of and assistance to teachers, and the development of action plans. The DIP gives curriculum supervisors a limited role identifying them only in association with one strategy: monitoring the identification of student intervention groups. During the time of the onsite visit, the DIP did not consider in any systematic manner the support that curriculum supervisors could provide in the academic domain or the appropriate number of curriculum supervisors and instructional coordinators necessary to meet

the service needs of the district. The instructional coordinator positions were established in school year 2012–13. While the district expects instructional coordinators to work across all subject areas, as there is only one instructional coordinator per campus, the job description defines duties and responsibilities within a specific subject area. The job description does not state how the instructional coordinator should provide effective classroom and lesson plan support to teachers in other subject areas, especially at the middle school and high school levels. According to the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools, the job description for the instructional coordinator position does not include the administrator certification the position requires.

To help instructional coordinators, the Curriculum and Instruction Department developed a non-core subject specific school year 2014–15 Curriculum Handbook. The handbook lists instructional coordinator duties and responsibilities, organizes the duties by month, provides an activities checklist for them, specifies the reports they need to submit to the department, outlines an elementary and secondary campus action plan, includes walkthrough forms, and provides a list of all professional development the district offers. The handbook defines the instructional coordinators duties in a generic way that is not consistent with the job description, and there is no discussion or guidance in the handbook on how an instructional coordinator should transition from focusing on one subject area to other subject areas. Neither the job descriptions nor the handbook specifies how the instructional coordinators and the curriculum supervisors coordinate their duties or how the curriculum supervisors support the instructional coordinators.

The coordinators' abilities vary and there has been turnover in the position, according to the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools. Many of the instructional coordinators have experience in the position and were hired from outside the district or were former instructional coaches. Some coordinators have had difficulty transitioning from teaching and coaching to a leadership position, which affects their ability to support teachers. Principals determine the duties of the instructional coordinator on their campuses; on some campuses, principals still use the instructional coordinators as coaches thereby limiting their ability to perform their intended duties. At the time of the onsite review, the district's website showed only 10 instructional coordinators, with none assigned to Amber Terrace Elementary and McCowan Middle schools.

The district assigned four curriculum supervisors to support the instructional coordinators. The supervisors spend 85 percent or more of their time on campus. The curriculum supervisors consider their primary responsibilities supporting the teachers in the classroom, especially new and struggling teachers; developing the common assessments for each grading period and updating the assessments during the summer. The curriculum supervisors conduct model lessons, develop pacing guides in some areas (e.g. History), and provide staff development on Saturdays and during after school hours. Principals, assistant principals, and teachers contact curriculum supervisors for assistance. On most campuses, teachers can contact curriculum supervisors directly without having to go through the instructional coordinator or through a campus administrator. The unfiltered access to the curriculum supervisors results in a time management challenge, given the volume of requests for assistance. Once on campus, the curriculum supervisors communicate with the instructional coordinator and with the teachers they assist.

The current instructional support infrastructure is not clearly defined. It does not delineate clearly and operationally how instructional coordinators and curriculum supervisors work together, coordinate their activities and through the synergy of their combined efforts provide added value. The current infrastructure is insufficient relative to students and teachers' needs for academic and instructional support. Both instructional coordinators and curriculum supervisors have duties across campuses. Both positions identified time management, that is, the ability to meet demand for support, as their greatest challenge. Having each instructional supervisor cover all grade levels—elementary, middle, and high—is challenging and has a negative effect on their accessibility, timely responsiveness, and support quality. The challenge is further complicated since the educational service delivery is administered by multiple district administrators which could hinder coordination efforts across grade levels. Each instructional coordinator position replaced three academic coaches and has to work across content areas. For instructional coordinators who were previously coaches, the transition has been slow and not always successful. The district has not provided any clear direction on how to optimize the efforts of the instructional coordinators and curriculum supervisors. There is limited connection between the job description of the instructional coordinators and the duties defined in the Instructional Coordinators Curriculum Handbook. The lack of direction also shows in the lack of recognition in the school year 2014–15 DIP of curriculum

supervisors' responsibilities and contribution. The current definition of the roles and duties of instructional coordinators and curriculum supervisors may be duplicative in the instructional and program management area.

Efficient organization and coordination of campus-based and central office-based support to teachers facilitates a clear definition of roles and responsibilities of each staff member and coordinated oversight. The roles and responsibilities of campus instructional coordinators and district curriculum supervisors are clearly defined and do not overlap. The role and responsibilities of the instructional coordinators who work across core subject areas focus on tasks that are not core area dependent, especially at the secondary level. The role and responsibilities of the curriculum supervisors, who are core subject specific, differ from the roles and responsibilities of the instructional coordinators, by supplementing them and providing in-depth assistance to teachers. The instructional coordinators and the curriculum supervisors are aware of the roles and responsibilities of each other. Central Office delineates the relationship between these two groups, defines how they coordinate their services and how each interacts with campus administrators and teachers. Teachers are informed how to communicate with the instructional coordinators and curriculum supervisors. Principals are aware of and support the roles and responsibilities of each. A central office administrator monitors how instructional coordinators and curriculum supervisors implement their roles and responsibilities and assesses the extent to which they meet teacher needs.

Since the time of the onsite review, according to the district, job descriptions for both instructional coordinators and curriculum supervisors have been updated with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, the Instructional Coordinators Handbook has been updated, and the DIP has been changed to reflect the roles that these positions play.

DeSoto ISD should strengthen the oversight of the educational service delivery function and develop two executive director positions to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of instructional coordinators and curriculum supervisors to identify and eliminate duplication and ambiguity, enhance coordination and synergy, and determine staffing needs to meet the students' instructional needs.

The executive director positions should report to the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools (see the District Organization, Leadership, and Management chapter for a recommended reorganization that affects this recommendation). The elementary schools should report to the executive director of elementary education and the middle and high schools should report to the executive director of secondary education. The assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools should work with the executive directors to review the instructional coordinator job description and the duties specified in the Instructional Coordinator Curriculum Handbook and reconcile the two to ensure consistency. The executive directors should jointly, with the four curriculum supervisors and instructional coordinator representatives from elementary, middle, and high schools, review the duties of both groups, identify areas of duplication, lack of coordination, and barriers to the efficient use of the coordinators and supervisors. The executive directors should submit recommendations to the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools redefining the duties of each group, articulating strategies for maximizing the coordination and efficiency of each group, and optimizing responsiveness to campus needs. The review should also address staffing needs required to meet the demand. The executive directors should inform the instructional coordinators and curriculum supervisors of their modified duties and coordination of activities. The executive directors should also monitor the implementation of the modified processes, evaluate their efficiency and report any concerns or modifications to the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools.

The fiscal impact assumes that the district would develop two executive director positions to report to the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools. The fiscal impact uses DeSoto ISD's salaries as reflected in the Texas Association of School Boards salary study from January 2015. The district pays 100 percent of employee benefits for each employee that works more than 10 hours per week, at $3,029 annually. Based on an average of five executive directors' positions in the district from this study, this fiscal impact assumes the annual salary for the two executive director positions is $207,160 ($100,551 salary + $3,029 benefits) x 2.

RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (REC. 13)

DeSoto ISD lacks sufficient ongoing training necessary to ensure that teachers effectively implement the Response to Intervention (RtI) process.

TEA's A Guide to the Admission, Review and Dismissal Process, March 2012, states RtI's role is to identify students who are not on grade level and intervene early. Tier I is high quality instruction for all students, screening, and whole class or group interventions. Tier II focuses on small group instruction and more intense and whole class instruction. Tier III provides more intense interventions and a comprehensive evaluation to determine whether students should receive special education services. In RtI, the focus is not only on the screening, but ongoing progress monitoring which includes analyzing the documented student data to determine if students are progressing.

DeSoto ISD implements RtI on the elementary and middle school campuses. Each campus has an RtI team that consists of a counselor, campus administrator or designee, parent, and a teacher that meets to discuss student data. The student RtI plans generated from these meetings guide teachers' instruction and interventions for students. In kindergarten through grade 8, the district uses State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) Reading and STAAR Mathematics assessments for screening.

All students who are on or above grade level are in Tier I. When students receive assessments and it is determined they are below grade level, they are assigned to Tier II. Teachers use the RtI student plan to provide instructional strategies for the struggling students within a given timeframe. The intervention timeframe is a team decision and could be two to four weeks or more depending on the student's progress in Tier II.

In Tier II, interventions include: iStation instruction and differentiated strategies embedded during the instructional day. Elementary students receive instruction during the reading/language arts, and mathematics block; middle school students during English language arts, reading, and mathematics. If students continue to be unsuccessful and remain below grade level, they move to Tier III. The team revises the student's RtI plan again and the teachers provide more intense instruction and work with students one on one. Counselors conduct parent meetings to discuss student progress and work with students in the RtI process by meeting with them every six weeks to discuss their grades and progress.

While a student is still in Tier III, the RtI campus team reviews the progress monitoring data, student work, and the student RtI plan. Teachers then decide if the student is making progress. If the data shows a lack of progress, the diagnostician becomes involved in the process.

There is no ongoing training for teachers to develop the skills and knowledge to implement the RtI process. Of the districtwide professional development conducted within the last three years, there have only been two professional development offerings to support teachers in implementing the RtI process. The district last offered RtI training in summer 2014. Attendance at summer sessions is voluntary.

The two summer sessions the district offered targeted speech language pathologists, speech assistants, and kindergarten through grade 5 mathematics teachers. General education reading and language arts teachers have not received RtI training during school year 2014–15. The special education supervisor stated there was no RtI teacher training during school year 2014–15.

Figure 2–19 shows the number of students referred to special education services during a three-year period who did not qualify for services. In school year 2011–12, 147 students received referral and of those, 39, or 27 percent, did not qualify. The next year, 151 were referred and 34, or 23 percent, did not qualify for special education services. In the third year, 66 students received a referral and 23, or 35 percent, did not qualify.

The significant drop in referrals from school years 2012–13 to 2013–14 was due to counselors receiving RtI training and serving as chairpersons for campus RtI processes and procedures to support teachers with implementing the

FIGURE 2–19
DESOTO ISD PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO DO NOT QUALIFY FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION SCHOOL YEARS 2011–12 TO 2013–14

SCHOOL YEAR	REFERRED	DO NOT QUALIFY	PRECENTAGE WHO DO NOT QUALIFY
2011–12	147	39	27%
2012–13	151	34	23%
2013–14	66	23	35%

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Special Education Document, school years 2011–12 to 2013–14.

process. During school year 2013–14, the percentage of students who did not qualify for special education services is higher than the previous two years. Counselors received RtI training, but the teachers did not. Training the counselors has not had an impact on reducing the number of students who do not qualify for special education services.

The National Center on Response to Intervention offers suggestions on training to increase the understanding and implementation of RtI. The organization has developed a training module based on the latest research from implementation. The Implementing Response to Intervention training module shows how using effective implementation strategies is critical for successful RtI outcomes. Some implementation strategies the training suggests that could be used in training teachers are:

- ensure teachers have a thorough knowledge of the RtI process;
- ensure teachers can demonstrate the key skills needed; and
- allow teachers to practice the key skills with feedback.

The National Center on Response to Intervention stressed once the training occurs, most of learning how to implement RtI with fidelity takes place in the classroom. Therefore, implementation in the classroom requires more support. The RtI Implementer Series Module 2: Progress Monitoring discusses progress-monitoring strategies such as using brief assessment tools that are valid, reliable, and evidenced-based. Another progress monitoring strategy is assessing students at regular intervals. For example, districts can use weekly, biweekly, or monthly assessments to promptly identify students who are in the most need of support.

DeSoto ISD should provide ongoing training for teachers on how to effectively implement and document the Response to Intervention process on each campus.

The director of special education and the elementary and secondary special education supervisors, in the absence of an RtI director, should:

- review the district's professional development survey results to identify teachers' RtI training needs;
- review and apply best practice resources in the training;
- align the training with teachers' needs;
- collaborate with the professional development coordinator to schedule ongoing training beginning in school year 2015–16; and
- monitor the professional development offerings to ensure the implementation of trainings.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

SPECIAL EDUCATION (REC. 14)

DeSoto ISD lacks an adequate system to provide oversight, monitoring, and training of teachers concerning the appropriate number of special education students alternatively assessed to comply with federal guidelines. The district exceeded the federal limit for special education students taking the STAAR – Modified (STAAR–M) in reading and mathematics.

DeSoto ISD special education students take the alternative state assessment based on modified academic achievement standards. The STAAR–M is intended for a small group of special education students who meet certain participation criteria. At the time of the onsite review, the director of special education supervised the special education function, directed by the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools.

The district has failed to provide sufficient training to help teachers implement modification and accommodation strategies to help reduce the number of students taking the modified test. The lack of training resulted in a low percentage of students becoming proficient in reading and mathematics.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 is a comprehensive federal initiative designed to improve the educational performance of all students. NCLB is based on five core principles: strong accountability for results; expanded flexibility and local control of schools; an emphasis on teaching methods based on scientific research; expanded options for parents, particularly those whose children attend low-performing schools; and highly qualified teachers.

Historically, students with disabilities are excluded, both formally and informally, from school and district assessments. To address this concern, NCLB allows school districts and states to exempt one percent of all students from the standard assessments. This 1 percent represents about 9 percent of those with disabilities and includes those with the most severe disabilities. Responding to concerns voiced by state and local officials, the U.S. Department of Education

authorizes adjustments: an additional 2 percent, those students identified as being in need of modified standards and assessments, could be assessed through alternative measures rather than the general tests. To address these students' assessment needs, TEA designed the STAAR–M. Students receive the assessments in grade 3 through high school.

When calculating test results for the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the U.S. Department of Education takes into consideration how many students, when combining the exempt students and the students receiving modified tests, surpass the overall three percent federal limit. As long as districts have unfilled slots in either the STAAR-Alternate or STAAR–M groups, either group could use the unfilled slots to meet AYP. If a district surpasses the three percent limit, the district does not meet the AYP requirements, and the assessment results that surpass the three percent limit cannot count as proficient for meeting AYP. DeSoto ISD missed AYP in school year 2011–12, the most recent data available, because of exceeding the overall three percent limit. Nine DeSoto campuses missed AYP.

The district's admission, review, and dismissal committee (ARD) makes decisions about the most appropriate state assessment for each student that receives special education services while adhering to state assessment guidelines and participation requirements. The district tasked the director of special education and the diagnosticians with monitoring students with ARDs. The diagnosticians monitor the ARDs through the annual reviews by completing the required information in the Pro Logic system. The system automatically monitors timely completion of ARDs. The director of special education monitors the number of special education students served through the Performance Based Monitoring Analysis System (PBMAS). The PBMAS is a TEA automated data system that reports annually on the performance of school districts in selected program areas such as special education. The purpose of both systems is to provide data to inform decisions about which students need to take the STAAR–M and whether the number of students meets federal limits.

The district met the federal limits on the reading and mathematics modified assessments in school year 2012–13. The number of STAAR-Alternate slots for school year 2012–13 was 1 percent less than the federal limits. The federal 1 percent limit for reading was 65 slots. DeSoto ISD used 38 of the 65 slots, leaving 27 unfilled slots for the STAAR-Alternate group. The STAAR–M group had a federal limit of 130 slots in reading; it used 156 slots, 2 percent more than the limit. The 27 slots from the STAAR-Alternate student group were filled by the STAAR–M group, as shown in **Figure 2–20**. Therefore, the STAAR-Alternate and STAAR–M groups did not exceed the overall 3 percent limit in reading and mathematics in school year 2012–13. However, in school year 2013–14, the number of STAAR-Alternate and STAAR–M slots DeSoto ISD used exceeded the overall 3 percent federal limit in reading and mathematics. Even though the director of special education was aware that the number of students taking the STAAR–M exceeded the federal limit, the district did not take any action to address the issue.

FIGURE 2–20
DESOTO ISD FEDERAL LIMITS AND UNFILLED SLOTS
SCHOOL YEARS 2012–13 TO 2013–14

SCHOOL YEAR	ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT	FEDERAL LIMIT	UNFILLED SLOTS
2012–13			
	Alternative 1%	65	27
	Alternative 2%	130	0
	Alternative 1%	64	25
	Alternative 2%	128	0
2013–14			
	Alternative 1%	67	0
	Alternative 2%	133	0
	Alternative 1%	53	0
	Alternative 2%	105	0

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, System Safeguards Report, school years 2012–13 and 2013–14.

STAAR–M covers the same grade-level content as the STAAR, but STAAR–M assessments have modifications such as larger font size, fewer items on a page, fewer answer choices, or simpler vocabulary. Teachers lack training on these modifications to support students. Regular education teachers receive training on how to effectively instruct special education students in the classroom setting. The training includes such topics as inclusion, differentiated instruction, special education laws, least restrictive environment, accommodations and modifications in the curriculum and assessments. However, in the last three school years, the district provided modification and assessment training one time, in February 2015.

To reduce the number of students taking the modified assessment, TEA offers guidance on testing accommodations in the 2014 STAAR Test Administrator Manual. Effective districts allow teachers to practice the testing accommodations in the classroom or provide training. For example, in providing reading assistance on the grade 3 mathematics test, teachers could ensure students have the following assistive tools available:

- scratch paper;
- color overlays;
- blank place markers;
- magnifying devices;
- highlighters, colored pencils, or crayons.

Teachers implement these strategies and use these tools to ensure students' comfort level before the testing occurs. TEA's website provides links to the Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Taking State Assessments resources for 2014 and 2015. These documents describe a leveled approach that organizes accommodations for students with disabilities by type. There are two levels of accommodations, Type 1 and Type 2. For example, some accommodations for Type 1 are projected devices, spelling assistance, and mathematics manipulatives. Some Type 2 accommodations are complex transcribing and mathematics scribe. Each area in the resource triangle has a link that describes the accommodation in detail.

DeSoto ISD should establish a special education services organizational structure that ensures that the district trains reading and mathematics teachers to reduce the number of students that take the modified state assessment, monitors the number of special education students that take the assessment, and takes corrective action if the number exceeds the federal limit.

To ensure adequate oversight of the special education services function, DeSoto ISD should eliminate the director of special education position and develop an executive director of special education services that reports to the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools (see the District Organization, Leadership, and Management chapter for a recommended reorganization that affects this recommendation). The district should align the supervisor of special education and secondary supervisor of special education positions within the direction of the executive director of special education to provide efficient and effective support for this function.

The executive director of special education and the elementary and secondary special education supervisors should ensure the district does not exceed the federal limit by monitoring the number of special education students on each campus who are designated to take the STAAR–M. The district should:

- provide the training necessary to teachers to reduce the number of students taking the STAAR–M test.
- have a diagnostician review the students' ARDs and compile data on the type of state assessment these students will take.
- review the list of students assigned to take the STAAR–M and determine whether the number exceeds the federal limit.
- if the number exceeds the federal limit, implement corrective action strategies such as working with diagnosticians and teachers to identify students who can take the regular STAAR test.
- evaluate the effectiveness of the corrective actions implemented and refine, if necessary.

The fiscal impact assumes that the district would eliminate the director of special education position and develop the executive director of special education position. The fiscal impact uses DeSoto ISD's salaries as reflected in the Texas Association of School Boards salary study from January 2015. The district pays 100 percent of employee benefits for each employee that works more than 10 hours per week, at $3,029 annually. The annual cost of this recommendation is $12,874 ($103,580 (executive director of special education salary + benefits) - $90,706 (director of special education position salary + benefits).

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (REC. 15)

DeSoto ISD does not provide adequate professional development teacher training to meet the requirements for the state of Texas teacher certification.

TEA requires educators to complete a specified number of continuing professional education or professional development (PD) hours every five years to be eligible for renewal of their teacher's certification. The Texas Administrative Code (TAC), Title 19, Part 7, Rule Section 232.13, requires teachers to complete 150 clock hours of PD every five years. TEA guidance documents on PD activities for classroom teachers focus on increasing knowledge of the subject area taught by the teacher. TAC, Title 19, Part 7, Rule Section 232.11, specifies that teachers are required to complete the PD content. At least 80 percent of the PD should relate to the certification renewal. This requirement targets PD in the TEKS included in TAC, Chapter 74, Subchapter A, district and campus priorities, and integration of technology into educational practices along with other activities.

DeSoto ISD has PD expectations and requirements for school staff. The board policy aligns with the Texas Education Code (TEC), 21.451(a) and (a-1). Board Policy DMA (LEGAL) Professional Development, Required Staff Development states that staff development should be predominantly campus-based, related to achieving performance objectives, and developed and approved by the campus-level committee.

The DeSoto ISD Full Engagement 2014 plan supports effective and efficient PD. In the System Safeguard Strategies sections of Goal One, objectives two, three, four, five, and six state that the district will provide training to teachers on content specific instruction and rigor, identify teachers in need of assistance, and provide support to those teachers.

The PD department consists of one support staff, one professional staff, the Parent Engagement coordinator, and professional development coordinator. The PD department has an allocation of $19,656 from the district's budget and $124,834 from Title I, NCLB, set aside for PD offerings, for a total of $144,490 for school year 2014–15.

The district's calendar denotes two days for new teacher orientation, which takes place two weeks before the start of school. However, according to interviews with new teachers, the Human Resources Department, and other central office administrators, three days are set aside for new teacher orientation. Human Resources and the PD Departments conduct the sessions for new teachers. The week before school starts, all staff attend three days of PD. There were two additional PD days noted for PD on the district's calendar. The PD coordinator stated three days are set aside for PD during the school year.

The PD coordinator described the steps of the district's professional development planning process, which include:

- topics are identified from proposals, instructional coordinators and lead teachers' input, and course surveys from professional development sessions previously attended;
- proposals are sent to teachers and instructional coordinators seeking presenters;
- central office contacts Region 10 for special training such as inclusion and accommodations;
- sessions are recorded on a matrix and are adjusted for the number of teachers attending; and
- district ensures all teachers attend sessions assigned by the campus principal or those that are mandatory.

Figure 2–21 shows professional development sessions offered districtwide during school years 2012–13 to 2014–15. The figure shows that the district provided foundation curriculum and mandatory PD on three occasions. From February 2013 to February 2015, the district offered 97 mandatory PD sessions. Of the 97 offerings, less than 10 percent focused on the foundation curriculum. The foundation curriculum consists of English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. TAC, Title 19, Part 7, Rule Section 232.11, requires that at least 80 percent of a teacher's PD should directly relate to the area of certification. Professional development sessions offered on October 6, 2014, had 114 offerings, and 120 sessions were offered on February 18, 2013, both fewer than the required 80 percent. Few, if any PD sessions were offered for teachers implementing the gifted and talented (G/T) program, Early College High School Program, and Collegiate Magnet program. Based on the number of professional development sessions offered that fail to meet teacher needs for certification, the district does not appear to analyze or monitor whether courses offered meet teacher needs.

FIGURE 2–21
DESOTO ISD PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION CURRICULUM AND MANDATORY SESSIONS SCHOOL YEARS 2012–13 TO 2014–15

DATES	PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AREAS	SESSIONS	PERCENTAGE OF SESSIONS OFFERED
February 18, 2013	English, Language Arts, Writing	2	2%
	Mathematics	5	4%
	Science	7	6%
	Social Studies	2	2%
	Mandatory	73	61%
October 6, 2014	English, Language Arts, Writing	18	16%
	Mathematics	8	7%
	Science	7	6%
	Social Studies	1	1%
	Mandatory	21	18%
February 9, 2015	English, Language Arts, Writing	0	0%
	Mathematics	6	6%
	Science	1	1%
	Social Studies	0	0%
	Mandatory	3	3%

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Professional Development Department, February 2015.

The PD department solicits teacher input for PD through the DeSoto ISD Professional Development Survey. The PD survey asks teachers to select three options that they think would enhance their skills. The options are:

- unpacking the TEKS;
- effective lesson planning;
- designing and delivering rigorous instruction;
- incorporating AP strategies into regular classroom;
- gifted strategies;
- accelerated strategies;
- student engagement strategies;
- developing a culturally inclusive classroom;
- standards-based classrooms;
- interpreting and using data;
- reading strategies for struggling readers;
- classroom management; and
- other.

Principals also provide input on teacher PD needs based on teachers' evaluations, classroom walkthroughs, and campus needs.

Teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the PD offerings. The district was not offering PD sessions related to the teachers' areas of need and certification. For example:

- teachers wanted more training using the TEKS as well as more in-depth training on the TEKS;
- high school mathematics teachers indicated they need more PD focused on their level; although the high school's instructional leadership team meets every two weeks to determine what PD teachers need, most of the PD provided has a middle school focus and is not content-based;
- high school teachers want more content-based PD that is not generic;
- teachers wanted more PD on integration of technology with instruction; and
- teachers asked for more focused PD at all levels, indicating that they found some PD too generic or too broad.

Region 10 works with individual campuses and teachers. However, the training teachers receive is not always implemented because of limited campus resources. For example, a middle school teacher who went outside of the district for SpringBoard training reported upon returning that there were not enough resources to support the training in the district. SpringBoard training is an intensive study of a single English language arts or mathematics course in middle school. The district uses SpringBoard to meet the needs of the middle school G/T students.

DeSoto ISD teachers stated that they need more in-depth TEKS knowledge at their level. Training would help teachers understand how to deliver this content in an effective manner and in various ways to meet the students' needs. Without PD

in their area of certification, teachers will not be able to ensure all students have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the TEKS. Failure to address the teachers' needs may result in ineffective classroom instruction as well as stagnant student achievement growth.

TEA has developed the Professional Development Imperative (PDI) to help campuses focus on purposeful selections of PD that align with the following indicators:

- Results-Driven Learning: Schools improve the learning of all students through well-designed professional development, using best practice research, disaggregated data, campus/district goals, and parent/community input;
- Student-Centered Learning: Educators pursue and select learning opportunities that meet the identified needs of students;
- Flexible Groups: Optimum learning and implementation occur in small, interactive groups, with group size determined by content and purpose;
- Collaboration: Educators, working collaboratively with parents and community, make decisions about the objectives, content, and processes that meet their professional development needs;
- Follow-Up: Professional development requires follow-up to sustain and evaluate learning over time; and
- Commitment: Educators take responsibility for their own learning, and organizations provide resources that support learning.

The PDI is a continuum to help campuses get the quality PD to meet their needs and a means to evaluate evidence of results. The continuum indicators range from the minimum expectations to the highest expectations in each of the levels.

DeSoto ISD should develop and implement a professional development plan to include an evaluation component that meets the certification needs of district teachers.

The district should form a professional development committee that includes teachers, an administrator from each campus, and central office administrators. The district should ensure the following teacher groups are on this committee: the foundation curriculum areas, enrichment curriculum including languages other than English, fine arts, career and technical education, technology applications, English as a second language, special program areas such as the academies, and G/T. The committee would:

- review the professional development resources from professional organizations such as: TEA, Learning Forward, North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, Texas Association for Supervisors and Curriculum Development, and professional associations in the content areas;
- establish a professional development model that includes:
  - professional development standards and objectives;
  - a process to conduct a professional development needs assessment;
  - a method to ensure all teachers' needs will be met;
  - identifying how the district can use the two distance learning labs; and
  - an evaluation plan;
- solicit campus and central office input on the plan;
- revise the plan based on input;
- submit the plan to the board for adoption;
- implement the plan;
- evaluate the implementation of the plan;
- revise the plan based on evaluation; and
- adjust the plan on an as needed basis.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY (REC. 16)

DeSoto ISD lacks adequate technology support to ensure teachers fully integrate the use of technology into the classroom. TEA's Long Range Plan for Technology, 2006–2020 (LRPT), developed by the State Board of Education (SBOE), meets the requirements of TEC, Chapter 32. Two of the goals in the state's LRPT are acquiring and using technology in the public school system and fostering professional development related to the use of technology for educators and others associated with child development. The state's LRPT recommends continued support for implementation of the Prekindergarten Guidelines in

Technology Applications and the Technology Applications TEKS in TEC, Chapter 126, Subchapter A elementary, Subchapter B middle school, and Subchapter C high school. One of the DeSoto ISD Board of Trustees public education goals is to have technology implemented and used to increase the effectiveness of student learning, instructional management, staff development, and administration.

DeSoto ISD has an LRPT for school years 2013–14 to 2015–16. The district's plan identified 14 areas of need. Two of the areas are that all staff and students will meet the State Board for Educator Certification and the National Educational Technology Standards for Students technology proficiencies and there will be an increase in dedicated campus and district staff to support instructional technology. One of the five major areas addressed in the district's plan is immersion of technology into teaching and learning. One of the objectives of the district's LRPT is to fully integrate the TEKS Technology Applications.

DeSoto ISD's Primary Goals Transformational Initiatives Plan enhances these district goals. Goal six of the transformational plan states, "create a technology-enriched school district that transforms the delivery of instruction and prepares students for the competitive workforce."

The instructional technology (IT) supervisor plays a key role in supporting teachers in the integration of technology into instruction. The supervisor has dual roles at central office and the campus level. Some of the IT supervisor's campus level roles and responsibility are:

- work cooperatively with directors and campus principals in developing and supervising instructional programs;
- plan and provide staff development for teachers, administrators, and staff;
- observe classroom instruction and provide feedback and assistance to classroom teachers to facilitate improvement and innovation; and
- demonstrate teaching strategies with students in the classroom.

These roles and responsibilities align with state and district expectations of implementing and integrating technology. Instructional coordinators are the primary staff to help teachers with the technology applications curriculum and lesson planning. Because a large part of the supervisor's job involves other duties, the supervisor's ability to spend time in the classrooms to help teachers is limited. The supervisor spends his time troubleshooting and confirming teachers know the technical side of using technology and not on helping teachers with the integration of using instructional technology. While the Professional Development Department offers some sessions for teachers to enhance their skills in the use of technology, few of these sessions are specific to teachers' area of need. Elementary, middle school, and freshman campus staff reported they have some technology, but are not clear on how to integrate it into instruction and felt that there should be professional development on technology.

In the absence of sufficient support from the IT supervisor, campuses use onsite support from campus staff. For example, in one of the elementary campuses, the librarian is the technology contact person. At the middle school level, the use of technology has not been fully implemented. At one of the middle schools, a middle school teacher is the "go to" technology person. However, these onsite technology support sources are not sufficient. When computers are included for classroom use at the middle school level, it is not always clear to teachers how to use them or integrate into instruction. As a result, the use of technology and its integration into instruction at the middle school level is limited. There is a perception of disconnected technology and curriculum initiatives at the freshman campus because technology is not perceived as a tool in the instructional process. There is a distance learning lab at the freshman campus, but it is seldom used. Similarly, not all classes at the high school are integrating technology.

To help campuses assess their progress of implementing technology and integration in the curriculum, campuses use the Texas Teacher School Technology and Readiness (STaR) Chart. Beginning in school year 2014–15, the STaR Chart is no longer required by TEA, although districts can use it as an informational report. The STaR Chart was developed to focus on the following four key areas of the state's LRPT:

- teaching and learning;
- educator preparation and development;
- leadership, administration, and instructional support; and
- infrastructure for technology.

The STaR Chart's levels of progress are Early Tech, Developing Tech, Advanced Tech, and Target Tech. A campus could measure its level of progress by completing the indicators in each area. The focus areas on the chart total to give a range of

progress. For example, the Early Tech range of progress is scoring six to eight, and Target Tech is scoring 21 to 24. The goal for all Texas teachers and campuses is to reach the Target Tech level of the STaR Chart. The levels are:

- Early Tech: 6–8;
- Developing Tech: 9–14;
- Advanced Tech: 15–20; and
- Target Tech: 21–24.

Figure 2–22 shows that none of the DeSoto ISD campuses reached the highest level of Target Tech. In school year 2013–14, of the nine campuses that completed the chart, six were at the Advanced Tech level. In school year 2012–13, only 50 percent of campuses were at the Advanced Tech level, and in school year 2011–12, 58 percent reported being at the Advanced Tech level.

TAC, Chapter 74, Curriculum Requirements, Subchapter A, includes the Technology Applications TEKS as a required enrichment curriculum. School districts must provide instruction in the foundation and enrichment TEKS. A district that does not teach the state curriculum standards is in violation of TAC, Chapter 74.

The district's goals and objectives listed in its LRPT for school years 2013–14 to 2015–16 cannot be successfully implemented if the campuses do not have support and a concentrated effort on implementing the Technology Applications TEKS and integrating technology in the curriculum. Teachers in the district have repeatedly stated that the district does not meet their professional development technology training needs. The teachers' needs appear to be twofold: teachers need basic technical knowledge of how to use technology as well as knowledge about how to integrate the tool or software in the district's curriculum.

The Muscogee County School District's Department of Instructional Technology (DoIT) in Columbus, Georgia, helps teachers with a comprehensive integration of technology, including tools that affect practices of teaching. The DoIT team sets clear goals and draws on expertise in both instructional technology and emerging best practices to plan, develop, deliver, and evaluate professional development that targets core academic courses and uses technology as a catalyst for promoting student engagement and enhancing motivation to support rigorous instructional goals.

Key to the work of the DoIT team is remaining up-to-date on emerging trends and best practices. The DoIT Team recognizes the importance of learning with technology and remains current with trends and in instructional technology by attending traditional conferences; however, there is an increasing reliance on learning via live webinars and videoconferencing. The team has embraced a digital learning ecosystem that supports teaching and learning for all educators and students. My Big Campus, an educational hub

FIGURE 2–22
DESOTO ISD CAMPUS STAR CHART SUMMARY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING SCHOOL YEARS 2011–12 TO 2013–14

CAMPUS	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14
Amber Terrace Elementary	10	13	9
Cockrell Hill Elementary	13	15	15
Frank D. Moates Elementary	14	15	16
Northside Elementary	16	12	18
Ruby Young Elementary	15	14	IC
The Meadows Elementary	16	15	17
Wooldridge Elementary	16	16	IC
McCowan Middle	17	18	16
East Middle	16	17	18
West Middle	13	14	IC
Freshman Campus	14	10	14
High	17	14	12

NOTE: IC=incomplete.
SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Texas Campus STaR Chart Summary, School Years 2011–12 to 2013–14.

between students and the web, has become a venue for team members to observe and practice technology coaching that models how to learn with technology. It takes educational components such as lessons, assignments and calendars and puts them in a safe, collaborative web-based environment. With My Big Campus, parents can be involved and feel secure that student interaction and learning is taking place in a safe environment.

DeSoto ISD should evaluate the district's existing instructional technology infrastructure resources to determine the most efficient method to align teacher and campus technology support needs with the appropriate number and role of staff to effectively integrate technology into classroom instruction.

The IT supervisor should analyze the STaR Chart data to determine where fiscal and staff resources are needed. For example, a campus at the Early Tech or Developing Tech level needs more immediate support than a campus at the Advanced Tech level. All campuses should receive support, but priority should focus on those campuses with the most need.

The district should require the IT supervisor to develop a model of campus support for the district to implement in school year 2015–16. The supervisor should review the model with the Human Resources Department; assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools; executive director for assessment and accountability; assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools; and assistant superintendent for student support services, school improvement and middle schools.

No fiscal impact is assumed for this recommendation, and cannot be determined until the district has evaluated its existing instructional technology infrastructure resources.

STUDENT BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT (REC. 17)

DeSoto ISD lacks a system to ensure that teachers fully implement the district's student behavior management model to address the high number of student behavior incidents.

The Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model is a schoolwide system that consists of proactive, research-based strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors with the objective of establishing a positive school environment. PBIS emphasizes a continuum of positive behavior support for all students in and outside the classroom rather than a piecemeal approach. PBIS improves students' academic performance, grades, discipline, and attendance. It has also been shown to reduce bullying and increase safety. Some schools have experienced a significant reduction, up to 60 percent, in disciplinary incidents. With fewer disciplinary problems, schools have also realized time gains for teachers and administrators to spend on instruction.

DeSoto ISD implemented the PBIS model in school year 2008–09 as a pilot in two schools. Region 10 provided the training and support during the first three years. Implementation was sporadic, inconsistent and not adequately monitored. PBIS lacked buy-in from a large percentage of the teachers who were expected to present lessons during their advisory period and promote student buy-in. DeSoto ISD re-launched PBIS districtwide in school year 2014–15. Region 10 provided training during the district professional development days training several teachers, an instructional coordinator and an administrator in a two-day session. One of the goals stated in the school years 2013–14 and 2014–15 DIPs is that "campuses will follow PBIS retraining all staff, displaying PBIS posters throughout the buildings, and training students in PBIS." However, PBIS is not mentioned in any of the Campus Improvement Plans (CIPs) in school years 2013–14 or 2014–15. The district still does not have explicit behavior standards and expectations and does not communicate those effectively to students and parents. Although some of the school year 2014–15 CIPs include strategies for retraining and monitoring teachers with a high number of office referrals, teachers still tend to send students to the principal's office rather than deal with the problems themselves.

The PBIS model is not being implemented districtwide by all teachers or with fidelity. The high school has the greatest challenge with consistency, as do some of the middle schools. For example, at the high school not all teachers are consistent in reinforcing established classroom rules, expectations and routines. At McCowan Middle School, not all teachers have been formally trained in PBIS. Teachers had to be retrained because the initial training they received was vague and they initially implemented it incorrectly. About 50 percent of the teachers are using it. However, implementation is not consistent and it has not had an impact on student behavior management and discipline. The principal at the Freshman Campus estimated approximately 75 percent of the teachers use PBIS and are implementing it with fidelity. New teachers and teachers with classroom management problems do not use the system. At Meadows Elementary, about 90 percent of

the teachers use the system, but not always in a consistent way, according to the principal. However, teachers who have used it for two years are more likely to address behavior problems themselves and not refer students to the office. Similarly, at Northside Elementary, while all teachers have been trained and 90 percent use PBIS strategies, not all use it with fidelity. The system has reduced discipline referrals to the office, according to the principal, but it only slightly improved discipline.

Figure 2–23 shows that while the volume of student incidents across a wide range of categories decreased overall in school years 2009–10 to 2013–14, class disruptions, fighting, disrespect and defiance incidents have remained high.

Figure 2–24 shows that DeSoto ISD has a high number of students involved in a large number of disciplinary violations. In school year 2011–12, DeSoto ISD had 5,212 disciplinary incidents resulting in 5,818 disciplinary actions. The number of incidents decreased to 4,315 in school year 2013–14 with 5,035 disciplinary actions, a decrease of 17 and 14 percent, respectively.

Figure 2–25 shows that, among its peers, DeSoto ISD had the second highest percentage of students involved in disciplinary incidents in school year 2013–14, the second highest percentage of students with out-of-school suspensions, and the second highest discretionary DAEP removals. Although DeSoto ISD was third among the peer districts in percentage of students with in-school suspensions (ISS) and the percentage removed to a DAEP, 16 percent of its students received ISS in school year 2013–14, and 2 percent were placed in a DAEP.

DeSoto ISD is a member with 14 other districts in the Dallas County JJAEP. Dallas County provides all services at a $114 daily rate. In school year 2013–14, six DeSoto ISD students were placed in the JJAEP. At the time of onsite review in school year 2014–15, the district had not placed any students in the JJAEP.

Effective behavior management practices promote the application of alternative discipline systems that reduce reliance on punitive and exclusionary approaches. These include adopting a code of conduct that uses a preventive approach to discipline as opposed to a reactive approach with an increased use of non-punitive responses to student misbehavior and limited use of suspension and expulsion.

Social-emotional learning approaches improve schools' ability to understand and regulate students' social interactions and emotions and reduce student misbehavior and out-of-school suspensions. For example, Austin ISD uses a social and emotional learning approach that promotes self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The district has implemented the program in 73 schools serving approximately 47,000 students. In school year 2012–13, the freshman class had a 20 percent decrease in class failures and a 28 percent decrease in discipline referrals compared to the freshman class the previous year.

Approaches proven highly effective with students include:

- Strong teacher-student and parent-student relationships. Schools that promote such relationships through sustained support for teacher development are more effective in keeping schools safe without resorting to use of exclusionary discipline. African American principals in urban schools who promoted parent involvement reduced the rate of suspensions. Research has shown that programs like My Teaching Partner that focuses on teacher interactions with students and relies less on exclusionary discipline for all students had a significant impact on reducing exclusionary discipline with African American students;

FIGURE 2–23
DESOTO ISD STUDENT BEHAVIOR INCIDENTS
SCHOOL YEARS 2009–10 TO 2013–14

YEAR	HARASSMENT	CLASS DISRUPTION	CAMPUS DISRUPTION	DRUGS	FIGHTING	THEFT	DISRESPECT	DEFIANCE
2009–10	35	647	129	68	465	91	421	912
2010–11	41	661	167	163	431	44	417	496
2011–12	30	412	221	64	445	66	270	294
2012–13	11	561	89	126	595	91	313	319
2013–14	18	469	57	51	611	82	313	361

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Behavior Violations, school years 2009–10 to 2013–14.

FIGURE 2–24
DESOTO ISD DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS AND INCIDENTS SCHOOL YEARS 2011–12 TO 2013–14

YEAR	ACTIONS	INCIDENTS
2011–12	5,818	5,212
2012–13	5,295	4,474
2013–14	5,035	4,315

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Public Education Information Management System Student Disciplinary Action Summary, school years 2011–12 to 2013–14.

- Implementation of restorative practices throughout the school aim to proactively build relationships and a sense of community and prevent and resolve conflict. Some research has shown that such practices are linked to reduced suspensions and expulsions, decreased disciplinary referrals and improved academics across all student groups, but most significantly for African American students; and
- Use of a protocol that assesses threats of violence without resorting to zero tolerance suspensions have shown to reduce suspensions.

DeSoto ISD should provide district teachers with complete training of the student behavior management model, educate teachers about the advantages of the system to gain buy-in, and require full implementation of the model consistently districtwide.

The assistant superintendent for operations, compliance and elementary schools and the school principals should conduct a comprehensive review of the district's discipline policies and code of conduct and assess the effectiveness of the student behavior management programs and strategies. This review should identify programs, strategies, and practices that have proven effective in managing student behavior and reducing disciplinary actions. The district should integrate those approaches into a coherent systemwide discipline

FIGURE 2–25
DESOTO ISD DISTRICT-LEVEL ANNUAL DISCIPLINE SUMMARY COMPARED TO PEERS SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14

	DESOTO ISD		CEDAR HILL ISD		SHARYLAND ISD		TEMPLE ISD	
CATEGORY	STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE	STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE	STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE	STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE
District Cumulative Year-end Enrollment	**10,606**	**N/A**	8,716	N/A	10,951	N/A	9,570	N/A
District Discipline Population	**2,176**	**21.0%**	2,094	24.0%	1,059	10.0%	1,772	19.0%
Students Expelled to JJAEP (1)	**6**	**0.1%**	9	0.1%	5	0.05%	(2)	(2)
Students Removed to a DAEP (1)	**236**	**2.0%**	206	2.0%	80	0.7%	254	3.0%
Mandatory DAEP Removals (1)	**57**	**1.0%**	62	1.0%	60	0.5%	141	2.0%
Discretionary DAEP Removals (1)	**207**	**2.0%**	176	2.0%	35	0.3%	158	2.0%
Students Suspended in School	**1,547**	**15.0%**	1,783	21.0%	994	9.0%	1,551	16.0%
Students Suspended Out of School	**1,163**	**11.0%**	1,009	12.0%	216	2.0%	787	8.0%

NOTES:
(1) JJAEP=Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program; DAEP=disciplinary alternative education program.
(2) Numbers less than five have not been cited due to the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 34 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 99.1, and Texas Education Agency Operating Procedure 10–03.
SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, PEIMS Discipline Data, school year 2013–14.

management plan that incorporates best practices, training programs, monitoring strategies, and annual data analysis to review changes in disciplinary actions.

The assistant superintendent for operations, compliance and elementary schools should assign a staff member to oversee the district's student behavior management and discipline program.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources. mmendation could be implemented with existing resources.

DISCIPLINARY ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM (REC. 18)

DeSoto ISD's disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP) lacks the infrastructure to establish individual student goals to plan for an academic program responsive to each student's needs.

The DeSoto ISD DAEP is located in a building behind the DeSoto ISD administration building. The DAEP facility has a classroom for elementary school students, a classroom for students in grades 6 and 7, a classroom for students in grade 8, a classroom for high school students, and a classroom for special education students. The DAEP operates from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Students stay in the DAEP classroom all day, eating breakfast and lunch there. On Friday, students have a physical education class in the gym. Each classroom has a maximum 15:1 student-teacher ratio, as required by state statute. The district does not provide transportation for students placed in the DAEP. The program has 13 staff, including a principal, special education teacher, elementary teacher, teacher for each core area, social skills teacher, counselor, instructional coordinator, computer lab aide, secretary, and school security officer. All instructors are full time certified teachers in the subject they teach. The DAEP has a computer lab with 19 PCs where classes rotate with each class spending one hour in the lab. It also has a new computer lab with 15 PCs used for core subject classes.

Figure 2–26 shows that the number of students placed in the DAEP varied in school years 2009–10 to 2013–14. It was highest in school year 2009–10 at 238 and lowest at 84 in school year 2012–13. It increased 1.4 times from school years 2012–13 to 2013–14.

Students can be placed in the DAEP for a minimum of 15 days and a maximum of one year. The principal has the discretion to send students back to their home campus earlier. **Figure 2–27** shows that on average, a student's length of stay at the DAEP has been from 27 and 39 days. The median length of stay ranged from 27 to 37 days. The average and median length of stay increased from school years 2012–13 to 2013–14. In school year 2013–14, 78 percent of the district's DAEP student placements were discretionary.

Although the DAEP provides instruction to students in the core subjects, the DAEP program's focus is on behavior and not on academics. Home campuses do not provide the DAEP with a report on students' academic status or needs. The DAEP does not test incoming students to determine their academic status. The DAEP does not tailor its academic program to the students' needs; the curriculum schedule The academic needs of the student. Upon entry into the program, the instructional coordinator should develop an individualized academic plan for the student. The instructional coordinator should provide the individualized plan to the student's DAEP teachers who should follow the plan. The DAEP should monitor the student's progress based on the plan. As needed, DAEP teachers should communicate with the student's home campus teachers. The DAEP principal should modify the transition plan to include a section on academic performance. The instructional coordinator should prepare a report on the student's academic performance and progress at the DAEP and identify areas where the student needs additional assistance. The DAEP should share the report with the student's home campus counselor as part of the transition plan. The DAEP principal should track students for at least one year after their return to their home campuses, asking home campus counselors to report on the student at least twice during the first year after the student's return to the home campus.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

LIBRARY SERVICES (REC. 19)

DeSoto ISD lacks a process to ensure that its libraries' budget, staff, collection size, and collection age align with public school library standards.

DeSoto ISD has 11 libraries: one library for each of its seven elementary and three middle schools, and one library serving its Freshman Campus and the high school. DeSoto ISD does not have a process in place to address library needs. Principals do not ask librarians for input as part of the annual budget preparation. The budget amount each school allocates to its respective library is determined exclusively by the principal at his/her discretion without any librarian recommendations or data on library needs. Principals do not consider the library

FIGURE 2–26
DESOTO ISD STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS
SCHOOL YEARS 2009–10 TO 2013–14

	2009–10		2010–11		2011–12		2012–13		2013–14	
GROUP	STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE	STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE	STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE	STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE	STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Students	238	100%	139	100%	128	100%	84	100	201	100%
Male	175	74%	97	70%	86	67%	50	60%	136	68%
Female	63	27%	42	30%	42	33%	34	41%	65	32%
Grade Level										
Elementary	23	10%	15	11%	14	11%	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)
Middle	99	42%	46	33%	44	34%	9	11%	61	30%
High	116	49%	78	56%	70	55%	75	89%	140	70%
Race/Ethnicity										
African American	192	81%	110	79%	115	90%	76	91%	176	88%
Hispanic	29	12%	17	12%	8	6%	7	8%	20	10%
Special Education										
Special Education	46	19%	30	22%	21	16%	16	19%	28	14%

NOTE: (1) Numbers less than five have not been cited due to the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 34 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 99.1, and Texas Education Agency Operating Procedure 10–03.
SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Disciplinary Alternative Education Program Students Length of Stay, school years 2009–10 to 2013–14.

FIGURE 2–27
DESOTO ISD LENGTH OF STAY IN DISCIPLINARY ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM
SCHOOL YEARS 2009–10 TO 2013–14

	2009–10		2010–11		2011–12		2012–13		2013–14	
STAY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
15 Days or Fewer	27	10.5%	10	6.9%	15	11.0%	30	31.3%	49	13.6%
16 to 29 Days	56	21.7%	40	27.4%	35	25.7%	21	21.9%	50	22.5%
30 days	23	8.9%	14	9.6%	28	20.6%	20	20.8%	51	23.0%
31 to 44 Days	34	13.2%	20	13.7%	19	14.0%	(1)	(1)	27	12.2%
45 Days	72	27.9%	41	28.1%	26	19.1%	21	21.9%	32	14.5%
46 or More Days	46	17.8%	21	14.4%	13	9.6%	(1)	(1)	13	5.9%
Students	258	N/A	146	N/A	136	N/A	96	N/A	222	N/A
Average Length of Stay (Days)	39.2	N/A	37.1	N/A	32.8	N/A	27.3	N/A	29.8	N/A
Median Length of Stay (Days)	37.0	N/A	32.8	N/A	29.6	N/A	27.3	N/A	29.2	N/A

NOTE: (1) Numbers less than five have not been cited due to the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 34 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 99.1, and Texas Education Agency Operating Procedure 10–03.
SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Disciplinary Alternative Education Program Students Length of Stay, school years 2009–10 to 2013–14.

program a high priority. Principals are not familiar with the Texas Public School Library Standards and have not used these standards to assess the adequacy of their library financial allocations, staffing and collection levels to identify gaps, or dictates the academic program. During a student's stay in the DAEP, there is no communication among the DAEP and home campus teachers. Students who want to take electives have to arrange with the home campus to deliver the elective

class assignments to the DAEP. It is also the student's responsibility to complete the work in the elective course and submit to the respective home campus teacher. According to the DAEP principal, the large number of students removed to the DAEP, the combination of mandatory and discretionary placements, and the great variance in students' behavior issues and level of academic performance, inhibits the use of customized education plans.

The DAEP and student submit a transition plan to the student's home campus when a student completes his/her assigned time in the DAEP. The transition plan specifies:

- the goals the student should address upon return to the home campus, such as avoid using drugs, use productive strategies to cope with stress, etc.;
- schedule concerns such as changing the circle of friends, focusing on graduation; and
- suggestions for success in the student's home campus including having a mentor, developing a plan with the counselor to address graduation, or pursuing a specific career interest.

The transition plan typically addresses behavior but not academics. It does not provide any information to the home campus about the student's academic progress in each core area or any academic difficulties the student experienced in the DAEP. While students now have to complete a survey as part of their exit procedures, the brief questionnaire has only one question about the helpfulness of teachers and no questions about academic progress.

The DAEP program does not collect data to determine the effectiveness of its academic program. The DAEP does not maintain any communication with the student's home campus and does not follow the student after he/she returns to the home campus.

A review of nationally recognized best practices in DAEPs pointed to eight areas to determine the program's effectiveness:

- use of one-on-one instruction with a teacher;
- establishment of individual student goals for program planning;
- an academic program at each student's functional reading level;
- staff development for teachers in conflict resolution;
- parent involvement at entrance and exit conferences for the program;
- the goal of success in the mainstream program after return to the home campus;
- no recidivism; and
- improved academic achievement.

In a survey of Texas superintendents, 77 percent indicated that they use one-on-one instruction in their DAEPs, 60 percent offer academic programs at the students' reading levels, 73 percent have a goal of student success in his/her home campus after returning from the DAEP, and 62 percent expect improved academic achievement.

Other best practices include:

- Nontraditional Education Plan: Teachers and counselors use individual student data in making instructional decisions and developing the plan. Students' differentiated (accelerated or remedial) needs determine learning plans. Processes in plan development include the review of current credit accrual and ensuring the student is making adequate progress toward graduation. The plan addresses required services to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities and English language learners; and
- Transition Planning and Support: A student support team that consists of educators from the home campus and from the alternative education program, the parents, student and other trained transitional personnel. The team is involved in all aspects of the transition process including assessment, planning and implementation of the student's transition plan.

DeSoto ISD should restructure the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) instructional program to assess individual student needs, track student progress toward specified academic goals, and follow up with students' home campuses to ensure continued success.

The assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools jointly with the DAEP principal and the instructional coordinator should develop and implement new procedures concerning the academic program in the DAEP. Before a student enters the DAEP, the home campus should provide a report on the student's academic status including academic performance data and identify any

set priorities and estimate funding needed. An analysis of DeSoto ISD's library budget allocations shows a substantial gap between what is considered an acceptable budget allocation, according to the standards and the library budget schools have actually allocated.

The amount that DeSoto ISD has allocated to library materials varied greatly across schools in school year 2014–15, as shown in **Figure 2–28**. The amounts allocated to the libraries in school year 2014–15 were below standards established by the Texas State Library and Archives (TSLAC) for the school library. The TSLAC has established standards for the funding, staffing, and stocking of public school libraries. An Acceptable Program Development Budget is equal to the number of students multiplied by the average replacement cost of a book. A Recognized Program Development Budget is equal to the number of students times 1.25 multiplied by the average replacement cost of a book. An Exemplary Program Development Budget is equal to the number of students times 1.50 multiplied by the average replacement cost of a book. The average replacement cost of an elementary school book is $18 and the average replacement cost of a secondary book is $23. All DeSoto ISD libraries have developing budget standards that are considered Below Standard. The elementary school libraries' budgets range between 43 and 63 percent of the Acceptable program development budget standard. The middle school libraries' budgets are between 47 and 51 percent of the Acceptable program development budget standard, and the high school library materials budget is 19 percent of the budget that the Texas State Library and Archives Commission standards classify as Acceptable.

The TSLAC public school library staffing standards are based on schools' average daily attendance (ADA). **Figure 2–29** shows TSLAC standards for professional and non-professional staff.

DeSoto ISD does not meet the staffing levels the standards set, especially concerning library aides. According to the minimal standards of TSLAC's School Library Programs Standards, schools with 500 to 1,000 students require one certified librarian and one paraprofessional or aide to meet the Acceptable standard. **Figure 2–30** shows that in school year 2014–15, the enrollment in DeSoto ISD's 12 schools ranged between 525 and 2,945 students. Based on DeSoto ISD's school year 2014–15 student population, the district is below the Acceptable staffing standard for certified librarians in one elementary school, Northside Elementary. Northside Elementary does not have a certified librarian; instead, it has an aide who oversees the library. DeSoto ISD as a district rates less than the Acceptable staffing standards for aides; according to its student enrollment, the standards state that an acceptable number of aides would be 11.5 aides, but the district has two. Thus, it has 9.5 aides less than the standard. Only one library—Northside Elementary—meets the

FIGURE 2–28
DESOTO ISD STUDENT ENROLLMENT, LIBRARY MATERIALS BUDGET, TSLAC-ACCEPTABLE PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT BUDGET SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

CAMPUS	ENROLLMENT	LIBRARY MATERIALS BUDGET 2014–15	ACCEPTABLE PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT BUDGET
Amber Terrace Elementary	677	$6,000	$12,186
Cockrell Hill Elementary	583	$5,750	$10,494
Frank D. Moates Elementary	633	$7,160	$11,394
Northside Elementary	525	$4,700	$9,450
Ruby Young Elementary	622	$6,300	$11,196
The Meadows Elementary	541	$4,150	$9,738
Woodridge Elementary	708	$6,000	$12,744
East Middle	703	$7,870	$16,520
McCowan Middle	836	$9,150	$19,646
West Middle	723	$8,620	$16,990
DeSoto High and Freshman Campus	2,945	$12,950	$69,301

NOTE: An Acceptable Program Development Budget is equal to the number of students multiplied by the average replacement cost of a book. Acceptable Program Development Budget was calculated using school year 2014–15 enrollment and replacement book costs.
SOURCES: DeSoto ISD, Enrollment for School Year 2014–15, January 2015 Enrollment, and Lead Librarian Data, March 2015; Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC), School Library Programs: Standards and Guidelines for Texas, 2015.

FIGURE 2–29
DESOTO ISD'S TSLAC PUBLIC SCHOOL LIBRARY STAFFING STANDARDS
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

	STANDARDS			
STAFF	**EXEMPLARY**	**RECOGNIZED**	**ACCEPTABLE**	**BELOW STANDARD**
PROFESSIONAL STAFF	**AT LEAST:**	**AT LEAST:**	**AT LEAST:**	
0–500 ADA	1.5 Certified Librarians	1 Certified Librarian	1 Certified Librarian	Less than 1 Certified Librarian
500–1,000 ADA	2 Certified Librarians	1.5 Certified Librarians	1 Certified Librarians	Less than 1 Certified Librarians
1,001–2,000 ADA	3 Certified Librarians	2 Certified Librarians	1 Certified Librarians	Less than 1 Certified Librarians
2,001+ ADA	3 Certified Librarians + 1.0 Certified Librarian for each 700 students	2.0 Certified Librarians + 1 Certified Librarian for each 1,000 students	2 Certified Librarians	Less than 2 Certified Librarians
PARAPROFESSIONAL STAFF	**AT LEAST:**	**AT LEAST:**	**AT LEAST:**	
0–500 ADA	1.5 Paraprofessionals	1 Paraprofessionals	0.5 Paraprofessionals	Less than 0.5 Paraprofessionals
500–1,000 ADA	2 Paraprofessionals	1.5 Paraprofessionals	1 Paraprofessionals	Less than 1 Paraprofessionals
1,001–2,000 ADA	3 Paraprofessionals	2 Paraprofessionals	1.5 Paraprofessionals	Less than 1.5 Paraprofessionals
2,001+ ADA	3 Paraprofessionals + 1 Paraprofessional for each 700 students	2 Paraprofessionals + 1 Paraprofessional for each 1,000 students	2 Paraprofessionals	Less than 2 Paraprofessionals

NOTE: ADA=average daily attendance.
SOURCE: Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC), School Library Programs: Standards and Guidelines for Texas, 2015.

standard for aides, but the library does not have a certified librarian, as previously mentioned.

Seven DeSoto ISD libraries rate less than the acceptable books-per-student standard, and two rate less than the acceptable collection-age standard. The School Library Programs Standards and Guidelines for Texas defines an Acceptable collection as a balanced collection of 9,000 books, audiovisual, software, and multimedia or at least 16 items per student at the elementary level, at least 14 items per student at the middle school level, and at least 12 items per student at the high school level, whichever is greater. A Recognized collection is defined as a balanced collection of at least 10,800 books, audiovisual, software, and multimedia or at least 18 items per student at the elementary level, at least 16 items per student at the middle school level, and at least 14 items per student at the high school level, whichever is greater. An Exemplary collection is a balanced collection with at least 12,000 books, audiovisual, software, and multimedia or at least 20 items per student at the elementary level, at least 18 items per student at the middle school level, and at least 16 items per student at the high school level, whichever is greater. Seven of DeSoto ISD's libraries are Below Standard. Two are Acceptable—Ruby Young Elementary and West Middle—because their library collections exceed 9,000 items. McCowan Middle School library is Exemplary because of its collection size and the number of items per student. The high school library is Exemplary because of its collection size, although the numbers of items per student is Below Standard.

The TSLAC standard concerning average collection age has four categories. Libraries in the Exemplary category maintain an overall average age of collection of less than 11 years. Libraries in the Recognized category maintain an overall average age of collection of less than 13 years. Libraries in the Acceptable category maintain an overall average age of collection of less than 15 years. Libraries that are Below Standard maintain an overall average age of collection of 15 or more years. Of DeSoto ISD's 11 libraries, three are Exemplary, four are Recognized, two are Acceptable, and two are Below Standard.

FIGURE 2–30
DESOTO ISD ENROLLMENT, LIBRARIANS, AND LIBRARY AIDES, AND TSLAC-ACCEPTABLE STANDARD BY CAMPUS SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

CAMPUS	ENROLLMENT	ADA (1)	LIBRARIANS	TSLAC STANDARD	LIBRARY AIDES	TSLAC STANDARD	OVER/(UNDER)
Amber Terrace Elementary	677	643	1 Librarian	At least 1 Certified Librarian	No Aides	At least 1 aide	(Under 1 Aide)
Cockrell Hill Elementary	583	554	1 Librarian	At least 1 Certified Librarian	No Aides	At least 1 aide	(Under 1 Aide)
Frank D. Moates Elementary	633	601	1 Librarian	At least 1 Certified Librarian	No Aides	At least 1 aide	(Under 1 Aide)
Northside Elementary	525	499	0 Librarian	At least 1 Certified Librarian	1 Aide	At least 0.5 aide	(Under 1 Librarian, Over 0.5 Aide)
Ruby Young Elementary	622	591	1 Librarian	At least 1 Certified Librarian	No Aides	At least 1 aide	(Under 1 Aide)
The Meadows Elementary	541	514	1 Librarian	At least 1 Certified Librarian	No Aides	At least 1 aide	(Under 1 Aide)
Woodridge Elementary	708	673	1 Librarian	At least 1 Certified Librarian	No Aides	At least 1 aide	(Under 1 Aide)
East Middle	703	668	1 Librarian	At least 1 Certified Librarian	No Aides	At least 1 aide	(Under 1 Aide)
McCowan Middle	836	794	1 Librarian	At least 1 Certified Librarian	No Aides	At least 1 aide	(Under 1 Aide)
West Middle	723	687	1 Librarian	At least 1 Certified Librarian	No Aides	At least 1 aide	(Under 1 Aide)
DeSoto High and Freshman Campus (2)	2,945	2,798	2 Librarians	At least 2 Certified Librarians	1 Aide	At least 2 aides	(Under 1 Aide)
Total	**N/A**	**N/A**	**10 Librarians**	**11 Librarians**	**2 Aides**	**11.5 Aides**	**(Under 1 Librarian and 9.5 Aides)**

NOTES:
(1) ADA=average daily attendance. ADA was calculated by multiplying school enrollment by 95 percent.
(2) One library serves Desoto Freshman Campus and DeSoto High School. The library is located between the two campuses.
SOURCES: DeSoto ISD, Enrollment for School Year 2014–15, January 2015 Enrollment. Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC), School Library Programs: Standards and Guidelines for Texas, 2015.

Figure 2–31 shows that DeSoto ISD's libraries average collection age varies from nine to 16 years. Overall, 20 percent of DeSoto ISD's library collection is out of date (15 years or older). The percentage of items that are 15 years old or older is highest at McCowan Middle School (37 percent) and Ruby Young Elementary School (45 percent).

Lack of sufficient library staff and books, aged collections and inadequate budgets affect the quality and usefulness of library services and the library's ability to meet student needs.

Multiple research studies in Texas and in other states clearly and consistently demonstrate the positive relationship between having adequate library staff and improved student achievement. While the role of librarians is critical to student performance, aides enable the librarian to focus on instructional-related activities rather than spending significant time on clerical tasks. Schools with well-staffed libraries where endorsed librarians also had aides showed consistently higher performance levels. The Texas School Libraries: Standards, Resources, Services and Student Performance (2001) study showed that lower than recommended staffing levels and especially the absence of library aides significantly curtail the range and type of services that librarians could provide. The presence of library aides and the number of hours they work are critical to librarians' ability to perform the range of high priority activities that affect student academic performance. Essentially, library aides free the librarian from having to perform basic library activities and allow the librarian to allocate time to activities that directly relate to teaching and training staff and students, such as collaboratively planning and teaching with teachers, providing staff development to teachers, facilitating information skills instruction, managing technology, communicating with school administrators, and providing reading incentive activities. These activities, along with incremental increases in funding, student use of the library, and a large and up-to-date collection of print and electronicresources lead to incremental gains in student learning and performance.

FIGURE 2–31
DESOTO ISD LIBRARY HOLDINGS COMPARED TO TSLAC STANDARDS
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

CAMPUS	ENROLLMENT	COLLECTION	BOOKS PER STUDENT	TSLAC STATUS BY COLLECTION SIZE	BOOKS 15 YEARS OLD OR OLDER	COLLECTION AVERAGE AGE	TSLAC STATUS BY COLLECTION AGE
Amber Terrace Elementary	677	6,497	10	Below Standard	1,605	2001 (13 years)	Acceptable
Cockrell Hill Elementary	583	7,015	12	Below Standard	765	2005 (9 years)	Exemplary
Frank D. Moates Elementary	633	8,039	13	Below Standard	1,747	2003 (11 years)	Recognized
Northside Elementary	525	7,739	15	Below Standard	1,284	2003 (11 years)	Recognized
Ruby Young Elementary	622	9,501	15	Acceptable*	4,308	1998 (16 years)	Below Standard
The Meadows Elementary	541	8,389	16	Below Standard	1,261	2004 (10 years)	Exemplary
Woodridge Elementary	708	7,368	10	Below Standard	1,425	2002 (12 years)	Recognized
East Middle	703	8,156	12	Below Standard	2,144	2001 (13 years)	Acceptable
McCowan Middle	836	18,242	22	Exemplary	2,001	2003 (11 years)	Recognized
West Middle	723	10,838	15	Acceptable (1)	4,055	1999 (15 years)	Below Standard
DeSoto High and Freshman Campus	2,945	12,926	4	Exemplary (2)	475	2005 (9 years)	Exemplary
Total	N/A	**104,710**	N/A	N/A	**21,070**	N/A	N/A

NOTES:
(1) The collection is rated Acceptable because of its size, although it does not meet the criterion for number of items per student.
(2) The collection is Exemplary, although the number of items per student is Below Standard.
SOURCES: DeSoto ISD, Lead Librarian Report, February and March 2015; Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC), School Library Programs: Standards and Guidelines for Texas, 2015.

DeSoto ISD should conduct a comprehensive assessment of the district's library services to determine the adequate level of funding, staff, and collection size required to meet the district's needs.

The assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools and the lead librarian should conduct a comprehensive assessment that focuses on the adequacy of the staffing levels, the library budget, and the size and age of its collection to ensure that these library components are consistent with state standards across all schools and that they meet student needs. Based on the assessment the district should set library service priorities, estimate the budget effect of those priorities, and include it in its future budget cycle.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

TEACHER ABSENCES (REC. 20)

DeSoto ISD lacks an effective system to reduce teacher absenteeism and ensure that the district minimizes its use of substitute teachers in the classroom.

Research has shown that teacher absenteeism has a direct effect on student achievement. Teacher absenteeism disrupts the learning environment of the classroom, and less learning occurs when regular teachers are absent; wi thin such circumstances, student motivation to attend school is also reduced. Several studies have found that a high rate of teacher absenteeism could negatively affect overall performance. Schools with a large population of poor students and low academic performance tend to have high teacher absenteeism rates. High teacher absences also tend to lower the morale of the other teachers and result in high teacher turnover.

Teacher absenteeism has been a concern in DeSoto ISD. The District Improvement Plan (DIP) for school year 2013–14 includes the performance objective of increasing teacher attendance by establishing an incentive plan for teachers. The performance objective is to increase teacher attendance from 93.5 to 95 percent. As teacher attendance increased only 0.5 percent in school year 2013–14, the DIP for school year 2014–15 seeks to increase teacher attendance from 94 to 97 percent using two strategies: (1) continue with the incentive program for teachers, and (2) recognize teacher attendance through emails, certificates, jean days or other incentives. The CIPs do not explicitly address teacher attendance, although the East Middle School CIP seeks to increase staff attendance. The incentive plan titled System for Effectiveness and Achievement in Learning (SEAL) rewards teachers with up to a three percent bonus based on their salary. Teachers can earn a one percent bonus for increasing their and their students' attendance to 97 percent; get a 0.5 percent bonus for obtaining a Met Standard in all four indices of Student Achievement, Student Progress, Performance Gaps, and Postsecondary Readiness on the state assessment; and a 1.5 percent bonus for earning state assessment distinctions in one or more categories: Reading/ELA, mathematics or Top 25 percent.

Figures 2–32 and **2–33** show teacher absences by leave category for school year 2013–14. In school year 2013–14, DeSoto ISD teachers had 7,644 absences. Teachers were absent for 55,767 hours. Of these, 38,830 hours were charged as absent and 16,937 were not charged as absent. The largest categories of absences included personal business, sick leave, and school business. Nearly 35 percent of the total hours absent (charged and non-charged) in school year 2013–14 were due to personal business; 33 percent of total hours absent were associated with sickness, and 23 percent of the total hours absent were associated with school business. The leave category of school business typically refers to absences associated with professional development activities. Of the 7,644 absences, 36 percent were associated with school business. Of the hours charged as absent, 50 percent were due to personal business and 47 percent were due to sick leave. Excluding the hours teachers were absent because of inclement weather days (1,086 hours or 137 absences) when the schools were closed, teachers had 7,507 absences.

The district uses substitutes when teachers are absent from school. Thirty percent of DeSoto ISD parents who responded to a LBB February 2015 survey indicated that their child is often taught by a substitute teacher as shown in **Figure 2–34**. DeSoto ISD had a pool of 207 substitutes in school year 2014–15. The district's proximity to Dallas and other districts makes the recruitment of substitutes easy. The district has three categories of substitutes: those with teaching certificates, those with a Bachelor's degree or higher but no teaching certificate, and those having 60 or more college hours but no degree. Of the 207 substitutes, 30 (15 percent) are certified teachers, 80 (39 percent) are degreed, and 97 (47 percent) are classified as "general," meaning that they have 60 or more college hours but no degree.

Figure 2–35 shows that DeSoto ISD has three daily rates for substitute teachers corresponding to three categories. The district also has rates for long-term substitutes and for paraprofessional substitutes.

Figure 2–36 shows substitute teacher costs by year from school years 2011–12 to 2014–15. Costs of substitute teachers were highest in school year 2013–14 at $761,988. From school years 2011–12 to 2013–14, substitute teacher costs increased 46 percent. **Figure 2–36** shows the projected costs for daily substitutes based on the number of person days for which DeSoto ISD used substitute teachers in school years 2011–12 and 2012–13. At the highest daily rate of $90/day, the district employed substitute teachers between 5,787 and 8,467 person days a year during school years 2011–12 to 2014–15. At the weighted daily rate, the district employed substitutes between 6,317 and 9,243 person days a year during this period. Using the estimate of 8,467 to 9,243 substitute teacher person days in school year 2013–14, DeSoto ISD's 573 FTE teachers with 187 assignment days per teacher, or a total of 107,207 assigned teacher days, were absent from 8 percent to 9 percent of the time.

Effective school districts take steps to manage teacher absenteeism and reduce the cost of substitute teachers. Northside ISD analyzed employee absences and noted that the average annual number of absences per district employee was 17 days. They also noted that there were no procedures for terminating teacher contracts for excessive absences. Northside ISD instituted the following procedures to better monitor absences and take appropriate action:

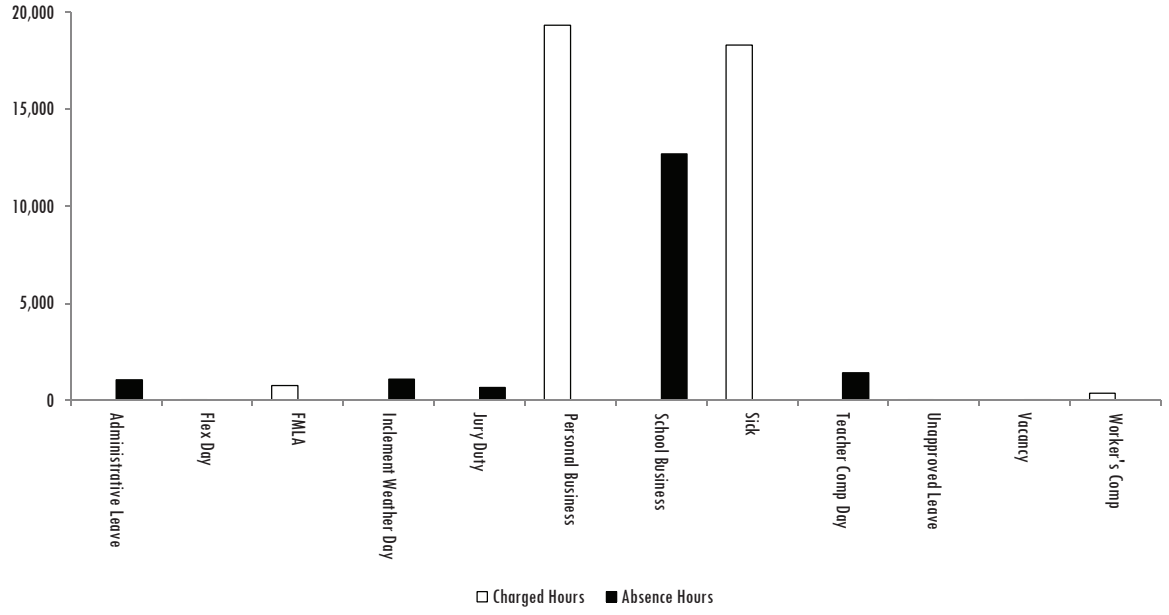
- generate monthly/annual absenteeism reports by work group utilizing an automated substitute finder system;
- analyze absence patterns by employee groups, departments, and campuses;

FIGURE 2–32
DESOTO ISD TEACHER LEAVE AND ABSENCES
SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14

	CHARGED		NOT CHARGED		ABSENCES	
	HOURS	PERCENTAGE	HOURS	PERCENTAGE	DAYS	PERCENTAGE
Administrative Leave	0	0%	1,060	6%	133	2%
Flex Day	8	0.0%	0	0%	1	0%
Family and Medical Leave Act	752	2%	0	0%	94	1%
Inclement Weather Day	0	0%	1,086	6%	137	2%
Jury Duty	0	0%	672	4%	87	1%
Personal Business	19,329	50%	0	0%	2,759	36%
School Business	0	0%	12,698	75%	1,704	22%
Sick	18,309	47%	0	0%	2,487	33%
Teacher Compensation Day	0	0%	1,413	8%	187	2%
Unapproved Leave	48	.1%	0	0%	6	0.1%
Vacancy	0	0%	8	0%	1	0%
Worker's Compensation	384	1%	0	0%	48	.6%
TOTAL	**38,830**	**N/A**	**16,937**	**N/A**	**7,644**	**N/A**

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Human Resources Department, school year 2013–14.

FIGURE 2–33
DESOTO ISD TEACHER ABSENCE HOURS
SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14



SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Human Resources Department, school year 2013–14.

FIGURE 2–34
DESOTO ISD PARENT SURVEY RESULTS
FEBRUARY 2015

A SUBSTITUTE TEACHER RARELY TEACHES MY CHILD					
	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Teachers	13%	38%	19%	20%	10%

NOTE: Totals may not sum due to rounding; 324 parents responded to the survey.
SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board, School Review Team, February 2015.

FIGURE 2–35
DESOTO ISD SUBSTITUTE PAY RATE
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

RATE	CERTIFIED TEACHERS	BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR GREATER	60 HOURS OF COLLEGE – NO DEGREE	PARAPROFESSIONAL
Professional Daily Rate	$90	$85	$78	$70 or $75 for those in Life Skills and PPCD
Long-Term Assignment	$90/Day for 1 to 10 Days	$85/Day for 1 to 10 Days	$78/Day for 1 to 5 Days	
Long-Term Assignment	$100/Day for 11 to 20 Days	$95/Day for 11 to 20 Days	$90/Day for 6 to 10 Days	
Long-Term Assignment	$115/Day for 21 or More Days	$105/Day for 21 or more Days	$95/Day for 11 to 20 Days	
Long-Term Assignment			$105/Day for 21 or More Days	

NOTE: PPCD=Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities.
SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Handbook for Substitute Teachers, Human Resources Department, school year 2014–15.

FIGURE 2–36
DESOTO ISD COST OF SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS
SCHOOL YEARS 2011–12 ACTUAL TO 2014–15 PROJECTED

MEASURE	ACTUAL 2011–12	ACTUAL 2012–13	PROJECTED 2013–14	PROJECTED 2014–15
Substitute teachers	$520,785	$733,660	$761,988	$624,832
Days at pay rate of $90.00/day	5,787 Person Days	8,152 Person Days	8,467 Person Days	6,943 Person Days
Days at weighted daily pay rate of $82.44/day	6,317 Person Days	8,899 Person Days	9,243 Person Days	7,579 Person Days

NOTE: The weighted daily rate was calculated multiplying the daily rate of each class of substitutes by their percentage in the substitute pool.
SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, 4–Year Analysis of Payroll Costs by Object—All Funds, February 2015.

- revise policy and procedures to include sanctions for abuse of leave;
- implement new procedures that required that all staff contact their supervisor personally on the third day of an absence even if the automated substitute system was being used;
- require a medical certificate after a given number of days of absence; and
- eliminate the absenteeism incentive program and implemented a buy-back-at-retirement program.

Northside ISD reduced the average annual absenteeism to 13 days per employee after implementing these procedures.

Addressing the issue of teacher absenteeism, according to research, requires a comprehensive and systemic attendance improvement plan of action. This attendance improvement plan consists of the following actions:

- review of board policy;

- discussions of sick leave use and abuse with teachers and aides;
- development of attendance guidelines;
- development of an attendance recognition plan;
- discussion of buyback of unused sick leave;
- improvement of teacher working conditions;
- appointment of an attendance improvement coordinator; and
- holding administration accountable for monitoring abuse of leave policies.

DeSoto ISD should review the district's existing teacher attendance improvement strategies and address teacher absenteeism through a comprehensive and systemic attendance improvement plan of action.

Given the negative impact that teacher absenteeism has on student performance, DeSoto ISD should give high priority to decreasing teacher absenteeism. Reducing teacher absenteeism would not only free financial resources but would have a positive effect on student performance. The district's existing strategies have not decreased absenteeism significantly. The superintendent should appoint a teacher attendance improvement team that includes the chief human resources officer, chief financial officer, assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools, principals or assistant principals and teacher representatives. The team should nominate an attendance improvement coordinator to lead the team. The team should review the strategies the district uses currently to increase teacher attendance, analyze teacher absenteeism to determine patterns by campus and identify teachers with excessive absences. The team should set an agenda and timeline for the plan to update, implement, monitor, report, and evaluate. The team should start with the review of board policies and consider adding sanctions for abuse of leave. The team should hold teacher forums addressing absenteeism, attendance policies, and soliciting input and suggestions on incentives and strategies for improving attendance. With input from teachers, the team should develop attendance guidelines, incorporate attendance improving strategies and incentives, and develop a system to monitor absences and hold teachers accountable.

DeSoto ISD should also implement procedures that could have immediate effects on attendance, such as eliminating or substantially limiting school-related reasons for absenteeism. The team should also investigate absences due to personal business and consider criteria for reducing the number of absences in this category.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

PROGRAM EVALUATION (REC. 21)

DeSoto ISD lacks a program evaluation system to ensure the periodic and consistent evaluation of district programs and use the results for program improvement.

Aside from reviewing assessment results of every grading period and student performance on state assessments, DeSoto ISD lacks a system to evaluate its district programs to ensure effective and efficient operation and performance. The district does evaluate its supplemental instructional software programs annually based on student performance, student usage reports, and cost effectiveness.

Using district-developed or state-developed assessments as the prime basis for evaluating program effectiveness does not give DeSoto ISD a comprehensive picture of its programs or sufficient data and tools to determine program improvement strategies and needed resources. These assessments do not enable the district to identify program weaknesses and pinpoint needed changes, guiding continuous program improvements. Reliance on these assessments limits the district's ability to pinpoint and address the reason for poor performance and to develop strategies to increase program effectiveness. Although the district stated the need to evaluate district initiatives annually and develop a plan based on results in its school year 2014–15 District Improvement Plan in accordance with Goal 4—improve communication, implementation, and monitoring of district initiatives, performance objective 1—the district has not taken any action to develop and implement an evaluation process. The primary reason for conducting program evaluations is to collect data to help district administration make informed decisions about various programs. Knowing the extent to which a program meets its goals helps determine whether to continue the program, modify it, or terminate it. Evaluation is necessary to determine if a program meets the needs of all students and the needs of specific student populations. Evaluation also demonstrates how well the program supports student achievement on district and state tests. Program

evaluation is a key component of accountability and improvement in student performance. Districts develop evaluation guidelines and procedures early in the process to ensure that the evaluation is comprehensive and that the district could use the evaluation results to plan for budget preparation, and improve program effectiveness.

A formal evaluation system consists of defined goals for each program, key measures, a specified evaluation methodology, detailed evaluation and data analysis procedures, identified data sources, assigned evaluation responsibility, and an evaluation schedule. A formal evaluation system also produces an evaluation report that includes a plan for implementing recommendations. The implementation plan typically identifies who is responsible for implementation and sets an implementation schedule and milestones.

Dallas ISD's program evaluation system evaluates academic programs, district initiatives, grants, and federally funded projects. To facilitate the process, Dallas ISD established a common evaluation and report organization framework that consists of:

- an executive summary or abstract;
- program description;
- the stated purpose and scope of the evaluation;
- the major evaluation questions and for each question, the associated methodology and results;
- a summary and recommendations; and
- appendices.

Dallas ISD posts all evaluation reports on the district's website in two formats: the full report and a brief "at-a-glance" summary.

DeSoto ISD should develop and implement a formal procedure for the evaluation of the district's programs and initiatives to ensure that each program receives a regular evaluation; that the district administrators, staff, and the Board of Trustees receive the program evaluation results and recommendations; and that a timeline is established to report the evaluation's status and results. The assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools should develop an evaluation framework that would define the purpose and scope of the evaluation, articulate the methodology and measures, specify the type of data to be collected, describe how the district would analyze the data, and outline the contents of the evaluation report. The assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools should develop a three to five year calendar, including assessing appropriate staffing and budget to be included in the next budget cycle, showing the programs and initiatives to evaluate each year, giving priority to programs that are used by the largest number of students. The Curriculum and Instruction Department should institutionalize follow-up evaluations conducted two or three years after the initial evaluation to determine if, how, and to what extent the district has implemented the recommendations of the previous evaluation and the effects of the implementation. Initial and follow-up evaluation results should be presented to the board.

The fiscal impact of this recommendation cannot be determined at this time. The assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools should conduct an assessment of the resources and staffing levels required to develop a budget to adequately perform the program evaluation function.

FISCAL IMPACT

Some of the recommendations provided in this report are based on state or federal laws, rules, or regulations, and should be promptly addressed. Other recommendations are based on comparisons to state or industry standards, or accepted best practices, and should be reviewed to determine the level of priority, appropriate timeline, and method of implementation.

RECOMMENDATION		2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	TOTAL 5-YEAR (COSTS) OR SAVINGS	ONE-TIME (COSTS) OR SAVINGS
CHAPTER 2. EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY								
9.	Conduct a systematic review of curriculum management system implementation and monitoring districtwide; identify areas at each campus where implementation does not meet criteria such as consistent pacing, fidelity and rigor; and identify best practice strategies to address these areas.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
10.	Develop and implement a comprehensive system to monitor and track student data to implement strategies to improve graduation rates and reduce dropout rates.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
11.	Strengthen the formal instructional and operational structure of the World Languages program through the development of Spanish, French, and other needed foreign languages, consistent assessments, and use of resources, and place the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and high schools as the program's supervisor.	($1,500)	($1,500)	($1,500)	($1,500)	($1,500)	($7,500)	$0
12.	Strengthen the oversight of the educational service delivery function and develop two executive director positions to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of instructional coordinators and curriculum supervisors to identify and eliminate duplication and ambiguity, enhance coordination and synergy, and determine staffing needs to meet the students' instructional needs.	($207,160)	($207,160)	($207,160)	($207,160)	($207,160)	($1,035,800)	$0

RECOMMENDATION (CONTINUED)	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	TOTAL 5-YEAR (COSTS) OR SAVINGS	ONE-TIME (COSTS) OR SAVINGS
CHAPTER 2. EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY							
13. Provide ongoing training for teachers on how to effectively implement and document the Response to Intervention process on each campus.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
14. Establish a special education services organization structure that ensures that the district trains reading and mathematics teachers to reduce the number of students that take the modified state assessment, monitors the number of special education students that take the assessment, and takes corrective action if the number exceeds the federal limit.	($12,874)	($12,874)	($12,874)	($12,874)	($12,874)	($64,370)	$0
15. Develop and implement a professional development plan to include an evaluation component that meets the certification needs of district teachers.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
16. Evaluate the district's existing instructional technology infrastructure resources to determine the most efficient method to align teacher and campus technology support needs with the appropriate number and role of staff to effectively integrate technology into classroom instruction.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
17. Provide district teachers with complete training of the student behavior management model, educate teachers about the advantages of the system to gain buy-in, and require full implementation of the model consistently districtwide.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0

RECOMMENDATION (CONTINUED)	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	TOTAL 5-YEAR (COSTS) OR SAVINGS	ONE-TIME (COSTS) OR SAVINGS
CHAPTER 2. EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY							
18. Restructure the DAEP instructional program to assess individual student needs, track student progress toward specified academic goals, and follow up with students' home campuses to ensure continued success.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
19. Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the district's library services to determine the adequate level of funding, staff, and collection size required to meet the district's needs.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
20. Review the district's existing teacher attendance improvement strategies and address teacher absenteeism through a comprehensive and systemic attendance improvement plan of action.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
21. Develop and implement a formal procedure for the evaluation of the district's programs and initiatives to ensure that each program receives a regular evaluation, that the district administrators, staff, and the Board of Trustees receive the program evaluation results and recommendations and that a timeline is established to report the evaluation's status and results.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
TOTAL	**($221,534)**	**($221,534)**	**($221,534)**	**($221,534)**	**($221,534)**	**($1,107,670)**	**$0**

CHAPTER 3. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

An independent school district's community involvement function requires communicating and engaging stakeholders in district decisions and operations. District stakeholders include students, staff, parents, residents, and businesses. Stakeholders must be aware of issues facing the district, support its priorities, and respond to its challenges. Communication tools include public meetings, the district's website, campus-to-home communications, extracurricular activities, and local media.

A successful community involvement program addresses both the unique characteristics of the school district and the community. A critical component of school improvement and accountability systems is a high level of community involvement. Community members and volunteers provide valuable resources that could enrich and enhance the educational system. In turn, community members directly benefit because they ultimately supply an informed citizenry, an educated workforce, and future community leaders.

DeSoto Independent School District (ISD) is one of the oldest settlements in North Texas located just minutes from south Dallas and is known as part of the "Best Southwest" portion of Dallas County. DeSoto borders federal Interstate 35 on its eastern border and Texas state highway 67 on its northern border. According to the district's 2014 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR), the city of DeSoto serves an estimated population of 51,483 residents and covers approximately 21.6 square miles. Major industries located in the city of DeSoto include manufacturers of solar turbines, a transportation company, a health care provider, a distributor of retail items, and several retail grocery chains, which collectively employ more than 2,600 individuals.

DeSoto ISD 's school year 2013–14 total student count was 9,399 students and is almost two-thirds (66 percent) made up of students who are identified as economically disadvantaged, with about one-third (36 percent) of the district's population identified as at-risk. **Figure 3–1** shows DeSoto ISD's student information by ethnic distribution. During school year 2013–14, African American students represented the largest student group at 78 percent of the total students.

FIGURE 3–1
DESOTO ISD STUDENT INFORMATION
SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14

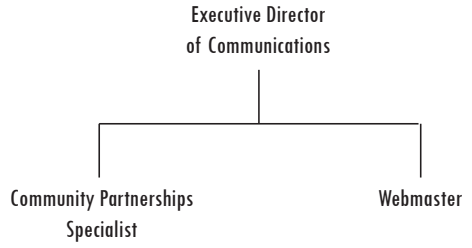
STUDENTS	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
African American	7,285	78%
Hispanic	1,669	18%
White	277	3%
Other	168	2%
Total	**9,399**	**100%**

NOTE: Totals may not sum due to rounding.
SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Report, February 2015.

DeSoto ISD's Communications Department is responsible for the district's communications and community involvement functions. The department has three professionals, which include the executive director of communications, a community partnerships specialist, and a webmaster.

The Communications Department is responsible for internal and external communications, media relations, education partnerships, graphic arts, and content for the district's website. The department maintains electronic policies and procedures to guide its daily activities. **Figure 3–2** shows the district's Communications Department organizational structure.

FIGURE 3–2
DESOTO ISD
COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATION
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15



SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

Figure 3–3 shows the responsibilities for the staff in the Communications Department.

DeSoto ISD's Communications Department works with the district's executive leadership team to encourage involvement with the city of DeSoto's businesses, civics, governmental, and religious organizations. This effort helps to promote positive relations between the community and the school district. By regularly participating in community-based organizations, DeSoto ISD's executive leadership team cultivates positive relationships within the local community and public awareness about the district, which promotes strong community and parental involvement.

Figure 3–4 shows 17 local organizations in which four of DeSoto ISD's executive leadership team regularly participate.

FIGURE 3–3
DESOTO ISD COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

POSITION	RESPONSIBILITIES
Executive Director of Communications	Directs and manages the district's public information activities.
	Serves as the information liaison between the school system and the community and as the district spokesperson that coordinates media coverage.
	Prepares press releases, publishes articles and photos in local media and other publications.
	Assists school personnel to publicize and promote performances, exhibitions, displays, or special programs.
	Oversees the processing of public information requests.
Community Partnerships Specialist	Assists with research, writing, editing, proofreading, and the production of internal and external communication materials, including press releases, feature stories, e-newsletter, brochures, reports, video scripts, website content, letters, and special publications for distribution.
	Collaborates with schools and departments to plan, develop, and implement communication strategies that strengthen the district's brand and meet district goals.
	Takes photographs for district publications, videos, presentations, and displays.
	Assists in providing media management during emergency and/or crisis situations.
Webmaster	Designs and maintains the overall appearance and technical functions of the district Internet and intranet websites.
	Manages and performs website editorial activities, including gathering and researching information that enhances the value of the sites.
	Stays current on copyright issues, privacy and public information issues, and district guidelines.
	Provides daily process management and assistance of website content organization, content development, addition and removal of content.
	Provides graphics design, development, and production of web-based materials for operational areas by coordinating and guiding process with departments' staff.

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

FIGURE 3–4
DESOTO ISD
EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14

ORGANIZATION	SUPERINTENDENT	ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT FOR OPERATIONS, COMPLIANCE, AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS	ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT FOR STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES, SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT, AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS	EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS
DeSoto Chamber of Commerce	X			X
Rotary Club of DeSoto	X			
Best Southwest Chamber	X			X
DeSoto Lions Club			X	
Grand Lodge of Texas Ancient Free and Accepted Masons			X	
Concerned DeSoto Citizens	X			X
DeSoto ISD Education Foundation	X	X		X
DeSoto Police and Clergy			X	X
City of DeSoto	X	X	X	X
DeSoto Arts Commission				X
Kohl's Ambassadors				X
Dallas County Health and Human Services			X	
Brighter Tomorrows, a domestic violence assistance organization			X	X
City of DeSoto Parks and Recreation department		X		X
Altrusa International club of Southwest Dallas County				X
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.				X
Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.			X	X

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

ACCOMPLISHMENT

- DeSoto ISD's Communications Department, in conjunction with parent engagement staff, the district's school leadership, community partners, parents, and students, works to implement academic and social support programs targeted to help students and families overcome impediments to both educational and personal success.

FINDINGS

- DeSoto ISD's community involvement structure is fragmented and does not result in the most effective way to manage this critical district function.
- DeSoto ISD should develop and implement a process to evaluate the district's use of volunteers to ensure the volunteers are appropriately assigned to areas with priority need.

- DeSoto ISD lacks strong media relations to promote and raise the district's positive media visibility.
- DeSoto ISD has not leveraged community partners to increase the funding resources for the after-school program.
- DeSoto ISD's independent, nonprofit education foundation has generated a low percentage of income and has functioned with poor internal controls.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 22: Reassign organizationally the district's parent engagement, after-school program, and education foundation functions to other departments to ensure appropriate management and oversight.**
- **Recommendation 23: Develop and implement a district volunteer tracking system to allocate a sufficient number of volunteers to help students and school programs.**
- **Recommendation 24: Develop and refine strategies to improve media communication and raise awareness of the district's academic and social support programs.**
- **Recommendation 25: Identify and secure community partners to permanently fund the district's after-school program.**
- **Recommendation 26: Work with the foundation board to restructure the district's education foundation so that the organization increases revenue and profits and employs the appropriate internal controls to sustain itself as a financially viable and beneficial organization.**

DETAILED ACCOMPLISHMENT

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT INITIATIVES

DeSoto ISD's Communications Department, in conjunction with parent engagement staff, the district's school leadership, community partners, parents, and students, works to implement academic and social support programs targeted to help students and families overcome impediments to both educational and personal success.

The district developed the community involvement programs to remove barriers to students' learning and to focus on improving instruction and increasing student achievement. The Communications Department uses an integrated focus on parent engagement, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement.

Figure 3-5 shows DeSoto ISD's numerous community and parent involvement programs and activities. The programs range from the DeSoto ISD Family Academy, which educates parents on a variety of topics, to Operation Graduation, which prepares students for graduation and postsecondary education. The initiatives include an employee rewards program that provides local businesses with a promotional listing in exchange for employee discounts.

FIGURE 3–5
DESOTO ISD COMMUNITY AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS
SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION
DeSoto ISD Family Academy	DeSoto ISD celebrates Parent Involvement Month with the annual DeSoto ISD Family Academy, the first Saturday in November at DeSoto High School. The Family Academy includes free continental breakfast, followed by three sessions to educate parents about a variety of topics and a motivational keynote speaker during the free lunch. Parents and students qualify for the free lunch by attending at least two sessions. Session topics include the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)/end-of-course test information, ACT/SAT college readiness assessments, college readiness, the Graduation Plan, Learning Parent Portal, nutrition, bullying, and parent involvement. Student classes include respect, leadership, character, and bullying.
Operation Graduation	DeSoto High School Operation Graduation is held the third Saturday in January at DeSoto High School. Operation Graduation is a free event for parents and students and includes workshops to prepare students for graduation and postsecondary education.

FIGURE 3–5 (CONTINUED)
DESOTO ISD COMMUNITY AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS
SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION
Employee Perks Program	Local businesses receive promotional listings in exchange for providing district employee discounts. This program renews each year, but discounts can change throughout the year at the discretion of the business.
Back to School Fair	Thousands of families get ready to come back to school. Free shots, supplies, and resources help families prepare to navigate the new school year. The event costs about $10,000, and it is 90 percent to 100 percent underwritten by community donations. Area students can partake in free immunizations from Dallas County Health and Human Services, along with live entertainment, games, and prizes. In addition, health screenings by local agencies, community services, and social service resources are available to families in attendance.
DeSoto High School (DHS) Alumni Hall of Fame and DeSoto ISD Distinguished Service Award	DeSoto High School has graduated individuals with rewarding careers who touch the lives of others—from artists, elected officials, and CEOs to doctors, lawyers, and entrepreneurs. DeSoto ISD celebrates their contributions through nomination to the DHS Alumni Hall of Fame.
	Prominent educators, parents, business leaders, and elected officials have made significant contributions to the development and improvement of DeSoto ISD. The district celebrates these individuals through the DeSoto ISD Distinguished Service Award.
Marketing/Advertising Opportunities	With more than 40 events at Eagle Stadium and 10,000 staff and students/ families that could be directly targeted, businesses could explore marketing packages to get their names in front of thousands of customers each week.
Teacher Mentor Program	Provides a safe and engaging platform to support new teachers and increase the number of new teachers who remain in the profession. Veteran teachers volunteer to serve as mentors.
Go Green Fridays	A program supporting the Eagles during football season, Go GREEN Fridays encourages the entire community to wear green or Eagle gear on Fridays during football and area businesses provide a discount to those supporting the cause.
Male Leadership Symposium	While primarily for DeSoto ISD secondary male students, this event is open to area young men as well as a Father Workshop the same day.
Collegiate Magnet Program (CMP)	CMP students perform community service projects as part of the cohort; they volunteer at district events as greeters and registration desk assistants.
Eighth Grade EXPO	Introduce upcoming grade nine students to Freshman Campus/DeSoto High School courses, expectations, and extracurricular activities. Community/Parent EXPO with guest speaker and resources for parents to support their children as they enter high school.
Holiday Party for Needy Students	DeSoto ISD provides students with the opportunity to meet Santa Claus at the annual Christmas Wish event for young students identified as high-need. Students enjoy snacks and lunch, arts and crafts they get to take home, storybook time, and a visit with Santa before receiving gifts, including warm clothing and toys.
West Middle School Christmas Chili and Giving Event	West Middle School staff spread holiday cheer by assisting 13 families in need, which a district department, grade, or group of employees adopted. These families receive gifts at the Kaleidoscope Christmas-themed annual chili cook-off. DeSoto ISD business partners assist with providing gifts.
DeSoto High School Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) Veteran's Program	The DeSoto High School JROTC Veteran's Recognition Assembly honors past and present service members, including Reserves and National Guards, on Veterans Day.
Fine Arts Holiday Cheer Event	DeSoto ISD fine arts programs spread holiday cheer during the month of December across the community with musical and theatrical performances.
Autism Awareness	DeSoto ISD sponsors Bowl for Autism in April and participates in World Autism Awareness Day with a global autism awareness campaign called *Light It Up Blue*.
Holiday and Homecoming Parades	DeSoto ISD, and several groups and schools, participate in the annual DeSoto Hometown Holiday Parade. In addition, the DeSoto High School Homecoming Parade includes entries from all campus and high school clubs and sports, along with many community entries.

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

Additionally, the DeSoto ISD Communications Department oversees district partners, districtwide programs, and senior citizen engagement programs to ensure community members receive opportunities to participate in school district programs and events. These programs include:

- job shadowing and soft skills training for DeSoto ISD students at a turbine engine overhaul facility; the company provides in-kind and financial support for district programs and students, and is a Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (T-STEM) designation partner to provide guidance on science, technology, engineering and math in today's workplace;
- financial and educational opportunities for students, parents, and district employees provided by a credit union, which holds elementary, middle, and high school financial literacy workshops, and sponsors district initiatives and programs, including an onsite credit union in DeSoto High School;
- department store chain's fulfillment center employees volunteer for opportunities including event preparation and district beautification days, and its headquarters donates financially to DeSoto ISD on its employees' behalf;
- an automobile dealer offers special employee pricing for district staff, incentives for staff attendance, marketing support, and more;
- a chain restaurant acknowledges academic excellence by rewarding "Straight A" students with restaurant discounts; provides an employee of the month program; and provides public educator special offers; and
- a department store chain provides gifts and gift cards for district events, including the annual holiday event for needy families.

Desoto ISD established a districtwide Adopt-A-School Program. Each campus completes a needs assessment, and the Communications Department connects them with businesses that build relationships with individual campuses to collaborate in meeting instructional needs of students and supporting the staff at that particular school.

DeSoto ISD engages in activities that show appreciation for the senior citizen community and encourages seniors to volunteer in the district. Participating seniors receive a card that provides free admission to all DeSoto ISD-sponsored home athletic events (general admission), high school theatrical plays, choral concerts, and band concerts. DeSoto senior community members volunteer or work part-time in DeSoto ISD schools as student readers, classroom assistants, office helpers, lunchroom assistants, and crossing guards.

The district's effort to engage the parents and community fosters a positive educational environment for the staff and students. The district recognizes the importance of community and family support and involvement and continues to foster it through the community involvement initiatives.

DETAILED FINDINGS

ORGANIZATIONAL ALIGNMENT (REC. 22)

DeSoto ISD's community involvement structure is fragmented and does not result in the most effective way to manage this critical district function.

DeSoto ISD's Communications Department coordinates the majority of communications and community involvement functions for the district. However, other district departments oversee and manage several critical communications and community involvement functions, which results in an ineffective organizational structure. These functions include parent engagement, after-school programs, and the education foundation.

The DeSoto ISD parent engagement function is an ongoing process that increases participation, communication, and collaboration between parents, schools, and communities with the goal of educating the child to ensure student achievement and success. Parent engagement is vital to student success. Parents are their children's first teachers, and parents are partners with teachers in the education of their students. When schools and families support each other, students achieve at higher levels. DeSoto ISD strives to show that parents, schools, families, and communities working together develop meaningful partnerships that ultimately lead to significant gains in student achievement. The district's objective is to increase student achievement by engaging and empowering parents to become involved in their children's education across all grade levels. A parent engagement coordinator dedicates about 0.5 full-time-equivalent resources to parent engagement activities and the remaining time to professional development. The federally funded position reports to the executive director of federal programs. During the onsite review, the review team learned that few

joint meetings and planning sessions take place among the federal programs staff and the Communications Department to coordinate community involvement activities.

The DeSoto ISD education foundation function generates and distributes resources to the district for programs and projects to enhance the quality of education. The education foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tax-exempt organization, supports educational programs for DeSoto ISD students and staff. The foundation provides funds for educational programs and activities that are either not funded or under-funded by the normal operating budget. The district uses these funds to facilitate student achievement and skill development, to recognize and encourage staff excellence, and to expand community involvement from individuals, businesses, and civic organizations. The foundation awards funds through a volunteer Board of Directors that includes business, community, and educational leaders. The executive director of assessment and accountability oversees the board's efforts.

The foundation achieves its mission by directing resources toward the following goals:

- encourage all students to work to their highest potential;
- support staff for innovative efforts;
- recognize staff for exemplary teaching;
- build community awareness for the DeSoto ISD Education Foundation; and
- inspire parents and the community to participate with the school district in enriching education.

DeSoto ISD has a free after-school program called Eagles That Soar for students in kindergarten to grade five at each elementary campus. Eagles That Soar replaces the previous Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) program, which the state no longer funds. The after-school program provides: (1) academic enrichment activities that help students meet state and local achievement standards; (2) a broad array of additional services designed to reinforce and complement the regular academic program (recreational activities and snacks); and (3) literacy and related educational development services to the families of children who are served in the program. Each elementary school receives $40,000 for after-school program operations. The executive director of assessment and accountability oversees the after-school program function.

The after-school program and the education foundation both report organizationally to the executive director of assessment and accountability. These two community involvement-related functions have little commonality with the functions performed by the Assessment and Accountability Department. With this fragmented structure of the community involvement function, the district suffers from poor communication, inability to establish priorities, lack of teamwork, and poor staff accountability. For example, the executive director of communications was unaware that the parent engagement coordinator was not adequately tracking volunteer hours, a critical community involvement function. Additionally, even though the superintendent promotes the after-school programs, he was unaware that the district's education foundation fundraisers do not generate sufficient resources to support the program.

Organizations may be structured in a variety of ways. The structure determines how the organization operates and performs. Effective organizations functionally align similar positions in one department or unit. A functional organization is a common type of organizational structure that consists of smaller groups based on specialized functional areas. This functional structure allows for operational efficiency because the employees have shared skills, knowledge, and goals.

Poor communication or miscommunication often occurs when information passes across several organizational units rather than vertically within a unit. As a result, formal planning meetings rarely occur between the two units ensuring effective communication. The same premise holds true regarding establishing priorities; commitment to priorities are likely stronger within an organizational unit rather than across organizational units. A fragmented organizational structure does little to foster the concept of teamwork. Organizational units tend to function as a team within their unit versus across units. Fragmented organizational structures do not promote staff accountability. Holding staff accountable for completing projects and other initiatives occurs more efficiently within the same organizational unit.

DeSoto ISD should reassign the district's parent engagement, after-school program, and education foundation functions to other departments to ensure appropriate management and oversight. (See the District Organization, Leadership, and Management chapter for a recommended reorganization that affects this recommendation).

DeSoto ISD should reassign the parent engagement function to the Communications Department to improve program planning, coordination, and evaluation. The district should consider renaming the Communications Department to incorporate the parent engagement and community partners' functions. DeSoto ISD should reassign the after-school program to the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. The education foundation Board of Directors should develop an independent reporting relationship by working with the superintendent to reassign the foundation to the district's Communications Department. Reassigning the foundation to the Communications Department could assist the organization with coordinating outreach to community members, which should positively affect contributions and donations.

The superintendent should present the proposed reorganization plan to the district's Board of Trustees for approval. Once approved, the superintendent should communicate to the staff and implement the reorganization plan.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

VOLUNTEERS (REC. 23)

DeSoto ISD lacks a formal process to track the number of volunteers and their volunteer hours to help allocate volunteer resources throughout the district. The review team requested a copy of the volunteer log, and in response, the district submitted a one-page log with estimated numbers of volunteers and hours. The district lacked a volunteer log with actual participation levels of community volunteers and a detailed communications and community involvement plan outlining the process and the individuals responsible for tracking and monitoring community involvement activities.

Figure 3-6 shows the review team's survey results regarding DeSoto ISD's school volunteers. About one-third of the parents surveyed indicated they strongly agreed or agreed that schools have a sufficient number of volunteers to help student and school programs; but approximately 36 percent of parent survey respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. An estimated 29 percent of parent survey respondents had no opinion, indicating they likely do not have enough knowledge about the topic. Fewer than half of the campus staff surveyed indicated they strongly agreed or agreed that schools have a sufficient number of volunteers to help student and school programs, while about 33 percent of campus staff respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. These survey results indicate that, overall, parents and campus staff believe that the district could do a better job of allocating a sufficient number of volunteers to help student and school programs.

FIGURE 3–6
DESOTO ISD
PARENTS AND CAMPUS STAFF SURVEY RESULTS
FEBRUARY 2015

SCHOOLS HAVE A SUFFICIENT NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS TO HELP STUDENT AND SCHOOL PROGRAMS.

GROUP	TOTAL	STRONGLY AGREE OR AGREE	NO OPINION	DISAGREE OR STRONGLY DISAGREE
Parents	328	35.7%	28.7%	35.7%
Campus Staff	531	40.7%	26.4%	33.0 %

NOTE: Totals may not sum due to rounding.
SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board, School Review Team, February 2015.

According to industry best practice, effective school districts count, track, and evaluate what they value, such as volunteer participation and time (number of hours donated). School districts recognize that without volunteers to perform certain functions, the district would have to hire staff to perform those functions at an additional expense. Parent and community volunteer hours enable school districts to conserve valuable financial resources and funds. Effective districts use volunteer data to make critical decisions regarding the distribution, use and management of these resources.

DeSoto ISD should develop and implement a process to evaluate the district's use of volunteers to ensure the volunteers are appropriately assigned to areas with priority need. The Communications Department should develop an electronic tool using existing software for campuses and departments to track volunteer information. The Communications Department should consider collecting data, such as the number of volunteers, the total time that volunteers commit to the district, what duties the volunteers perform, any achievements of the volunteers, and the effectiveness of the volunteers and district staff working together. The Communications Department should establish a regular schedule for campuses and departments to submit this information. The Communications Department should use this information to effectively manage and allocate volunteers throughout the district. The Communications Department should make any necessary recommendations regarding use of volunteers to campus and department leaders.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

MEDIA VISIBILITY (REC. 24)

DeSoto ISD lacks strong media relations to promote and raise the district's positive media visibility.

DeSoto ISD often reaches out to media organizations late and misses opportunities to feed more comprehensive news stories to make coverage easier. The district's lack of strong media relations makes it difficult to convey the positive aspects of school district programs and activities to the public. District staff indicated that sometimes they reach out to the media late because the Communications Department only has three staff members and because often they have to complete other priorities. The district lacks a formal process to communicate with the media, which leads to a reactive rather than proactive approach to media relations. When competing for news coverage and opportunities to increase the district's positive image, DeSoto ISD is competing for news coverage with Dallas ISD, the second largest school district in Texas, and neighboring school districts that include Cedar Hill ISD, Duncanville ISD, and Lancaster ISD.

The district established several special programs that present an opportunity for positive media visibility. DeSoto ISD has:

- compiled up-to-date email addresses and cell phone numbers for a high percentage of parents. Parents regularly receive text messages, automated calls, and emails about activities and important events at schools, and districtwide events. The Communications Department has an accurate and up-to-date contact list and community outreach methods for community and business partners;
- established a large number of community involvement-oriented academic and social support programs targeted to help students and families overcome barriers to learning and improve instruction and student achievement. The department uses an integrated focus for parent engagement, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement; and
- pursued and was awarded a $7.7 million federal grant in 2014, called Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). The purpose of the GEAR UP grant is to implement a comprehensive early intervention program that could establish a college-going culture; this culture is intended to foster the development of highly effective teachers, leaders, and communities of high-performing learners by increasing the academic achievement levels of under-represented, low-income, special needs, and minority students and by contributing to their preparedness and success in college and careers.

Positive media stories often highlight outstanding students and other aspects about a school district that commonly go unnoticed. In contrast, when unfortunate situations occur, without strong media relationships, the public could only see the negative aspects of a situation. Effective school districts work to maintain balanced media exposure to highlight special events that make the district unique.

DeSoto ISD should develop and refine strategies to improve media communication and raise awareness of the district's academic and social support programs. The executive director of communications should establish media relations as a priority for the department and should develop a process for how and when the department should communicate with the media. This process should include clear guidelines for media relations and responses.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM (REC. 25)

DeSoto ISD has not leveraged community partners to increase the funding resources for the after-school program.

DeSoto ISD secured a five-year U.S. Department of Education 21st Century after-school grant, administered by the Texas Education Agency, for all seven elementary schools that concluded at the end of school year 2013–14. The school district depended heavily on the after-school programming, particularly for its economically disadvantaged students and for students that need after-school care until their parents pick them up. The grant provided:

- academic enrichment activities that help students meet state and local achievement standards;
- additional services intended to reinforce and complement the regular academic program (recreational activities and snacks); and
- literacy and related educational development services to the families of children served in the program.

During school year 2014–15, DeSoto ISD funded a similar after-school program from its general fund that supported its seven elementary schools at an amount of $280,000, or $40,000 for each school. Each school receives the funds to pay the program's teachers, and the Child Nutrition Department provides light snacks.

Since the five-year grant ended, the district has lacked financial resources to permanently fund the after-school program. The district identified funding from the general fund for school year 2014–15, but it cannot afford to use these funds on the after-school program beyond this year; the district plans to divert these funds for other priorities going forward. The district is exploring a possible alternative for after-school programming with local organizations. Often, the implementation of an after-school program by a local organization is at a cost to students. Considering that nearly two-thirds of DeSoto ISD's students are economically disadvantaged, a fee-for-service program could be cost-prohibitive for many families.

Additionally, the academic curriculum for the after-school program does not specifically address individual students with academic deficiencies, nor does the program document the improvement students make as a result of participating in the program.

Trinity ISD worked with the local Boys & Girls Club to implement a program for grades one to 12. The program consists of academic enrichment and recreation activities at the end of each school day from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Approximately 70 percent of the students enrolled in the program achieve honor roll status.

The Boys & Girls Club program fosters lifelong learners by supporting academic success, setting higher college and career goals, and providing access to tools and technology that prepare students for the future, similar to the 21st Century after-school grant. Educational and career development programming includes:

- literacy, math and science skills;
- tutoring and homework assistance;
- college and career preparation; and
- computer labs and technology curriculum.

Boys & Girls Clubs encourage youths to develop creativity and cultural awareness through knowledge and appreciation of art and recreational programs. The Boys & Girls Club charged Trinity ISD $1,000 per month for the administrative staff and tutors it provided, and the district charged the organization $1,000 per month for rent.

In addition, Communities In Schools (CIS) is one of the nation's largest and most effective organizations dedicated to keeping students in school and helping them succeed in life. The CIS program model positions site coordinators inside schools to assess students' needs and to provide resources to meet their needs. CIS partners with local businesses, social service agencies, healthcare providers, and volunteers to provide after-school meals, school supplies, health care, counseling, academic assistance, and positive role models.

High-quality after-school programs can result in improved attendance, behavior, and coursework. Students participating in high-quality after-school programs attend school more regularly, behave better, receive better grades, and have improved test scores compared to nonparticipating students. Studies link regular participation in high-quality after-school programs to gains in standardized test scores and work habits and to reductions in behavior problems among disadvantaged students.

DeSoto ISD should identify and secure community partners to permanently fund the district's after-school program. Organizations in the area should be able to fund the teachers, curriculum development, and after-school snacks that DeSoto ISD provides so that students could continue receiving a similar level of academic and recreational enrichment to what the 21st Century after-school grant provided, minimizing the use of the district's financial resources.

Additionally, the executive director of communications should work collaboratively with all of the assistant superintendents (elementary, middle and high schools) to secure programs and grants in the Dallas area to provide a comprehensive after-school program.

The executive director of assessment and accountability should ensure that the academic programs target individual students with academic deficiencies and should monitor and document the improvement in student academic performance.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

EDUCATION FOUNDATION (REC. 26)

DeSoto ISD's independent, nonprofit education foundation has generated a low percentage of income and has functioned with poor internal controls. Since school year 2010–11, the foundation provided limited scholarships and grants to students and teachers; net profits from fund-raisers continue to decrease.

The DeSoto ISD Education Foundation, founded in 1999, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tax-exempt organization that generates and distributes resources to DeSoto ISD for programs and projects that enhance the quality of education and provide students with opportunities to become contributing citizens. The foundation's mission is directing resources toward the following goals:

- encourage all students to work to their highest potential;
- support staff for innovative efforts;
- recognize staff for exemplary teaching;
- build community awareness for the DeSoto ISD Education Foundation; and
- inspire parents and the community to participate with the school district in enriching education.

Some of the key responsibilities that the DeSoto ISD Education Foundation board has not adequately addressed include: ensuring appropriate leadership and staff to manage operations; ensuring effective planning; ensuring adequate financial resources; protecting assets and providing proper financial oversight; and ensuring legal and ethical integrity.

For example, the executive administrative assistant carries out the daily responsibilities of the foundation, but the foundation's board does not require the position to have a professional background or experience needed to perpetuate the mission and goals of the organization. Moreover, review team interviews identified inadequate internal controls over the receipt of funds. For example, the foundation's executive administrative assistant logs in all funds received, deposits the funds (sometimes cash donations), and reconciles the foundation's bank accounts.

For three consecutive years, the net income from the foundation's major fund-raising events yielded low profits, which suggests poorly planned events. Low profitability from the fund-raising events resulted in inadequate funding for grants and scholarships available for school campuses.

The review team also identified other instances of inadequate internal controls. Although the foundation is a legally independent entity from the school district, many education foundations have one or two school district administrators on their boards to ensure adherence to legal and ethical standards. The DeSoto ISD superintendent is a member of the foundation board; however, he acknowledged a lack of knowledge regarding internal controls and indicated that not having additional school administrators on the foundation board may not provide an appropriate level of oversight.

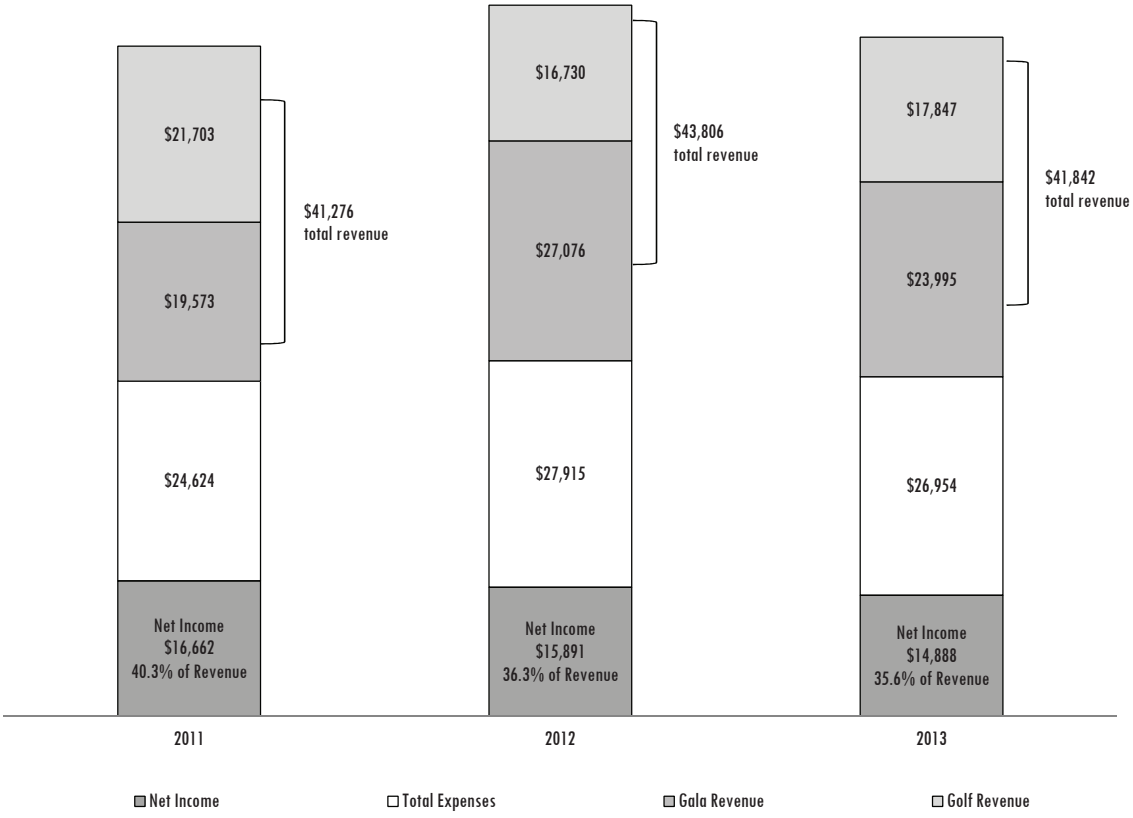
Within the school district's organizational structure, the executive director of assessment and accountability supervises the district's foundation, but that department has little interaction with the foundation to ensure it is functioning appropriately. During interviews with DeSoto ISD school district officials, the review team learned that in recent years, the foundation board experienced high turnover with a number of its board officers and members.

Since inception, the foundation has granted more than $350,000 to DeSoto ISD educators. The foundation holds an annual golf tournament each fall and a gala each spring to honor the top DeSoto High School students and their most influential teacher. During school year 2013–14, the foundation donated more than $18,500 to DeSoto ISD campuses, including $6,000 to fund a digital library.

Figure 3–7 shows five years of education foundation contributions and net income. The foundation raised more than $350,000 since inception; however, the organizations filed Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Form 990, Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax, for the last three district's fiscal years (2011, 2012, and 2013) shows that the foundation raised an average of $42,300 annual revenue and a net income average of $15,800. Tax-exempt organizations must file this form annually. The net income as a percentage of revenue is continuously decreasing and reported as 40.3 percent, 36.3 percent, and 35.6 percent, respectively, for the three fiscal years reviewed. The foundation has not restructured or taken action to improve its two main fund-raising events during the past three fiscal years to increase overall profitability.

Figure 3–8 shows the Education Foundation funding sources. The district's foundation anticipates both slightly higher revenue and net income for the district's fiscal year 2014. Even with the increase in revenue and net income, net income as a percentage of revenue continues to be low.

FIGURE 3–7
DESOTO ISD EDUCATION FOUNDATION FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND NET INCOME
FISCAL YEARS 2011 TO 2013



SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

FIGURE 3–8
DESOTO ISD EDUCATION FOUNDATION MAJOR FUNDING SOURCES
FISCAL YEAR 2014

PROGRAM/ACTIVITY	REVENUE	ANTICIPATED NET INCOME
Annual Gala Honoring Top 25 Seniors and Distinguished Teacher	$21,215	$3,206
Annual Charity Golf Tournament	$17,560	$9,529
Annual Drive Campaign	$5,369	$5,369
DeSoto Education Foundation Board Member Commitment	$400	$400
Bealls Department Community Giving Program	$1,329	$1,329
Staff Campaign Appeal	$3,663	$3,663
Total	$49,536	$23,496

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

Effective foundation boards establish these basic responsibilities:

- determine mission and purpose: develop and review a statement of mission and purpose to articulate the organization's goals, means, and primary constituents served;
- select the chief executive: boards must reach a consensus on the chief executive's responsibilities and undertake a careful search to find the most qualified individual for the position;
- support and evaluate the chief executive: the board should ensure that the chief executive has the moral and professional support he or she needs to further the goals of the organization;
- ensure effective planning: boards must participate in an overall planning process and assist in implementing and monitoring the plan's goals;
- monitor and strengthen programs and services: determine which programs are consistent with the organization's mission and monitor their effectiveness;
- ensure adequate financial resources: one of the board's foremost responsibilities is to secure adequate resources for the organization to fulfill its mission;
- protect assets and provide proper financial oversight: assist in developing the annual budget and ensuring that proper financial controls are in place;
- build a competent board: articulate prerequisites for candidates, orient new members, and periodically and comprehensively evaluate the board's performance;
- ensure legal and ethical integrity: the board is ultimately responsible for adherence to legal standards and ethical norms; and
- enhance the organization's public standing: clearly articulate the organization's mission, accomplishments, and goals to the public and garner support from the community.

The IRS lacks specific guidelines regarding the amount or percentage of net income a nonprofit organization must yield to maintain its nonprofit status. However, the Better Business Bureau published general guidelines for nonprofits, which indicate these organizations should spend at least 65 percent of its total expenses on direct program activities and no more than 35 percent of related contributions on fund-raising. Related fund-raising effort contributions include donations, legacies, and other gifts received because of fund-raising efforts.

When organizations do not meet this general guideline and donors research actual revenues raised and operational/administrative expenses, donors may decrease their financial support to the organization because the intended benefactors receive a low percentage of contributed funds. Although the foundation is independent of the school district, the district risks its reputation and credibility in the community in the event of mismanagement because the organization is raising funds on its behalf.

Additionally, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) establishes accounting standards used by for-profit and nonprofit organizations. These standards state that the lack of adequate internal controls related to the same staff member logging in all funds received, depositing funds into the bank (including cash donations), and reconciling the foundation's bank accounts leaves the organization vulnerable for fraud and other mismanagement issues. AICPA standards establish a separation of duties that states no single individual should be responsible for receiving, recording and depositing funds, or writing and signing checks. Checks and balances are essential to make embezzlement difficult. For example, the same position should not be responsible for handling cash receipts and bank reconciliations. Best practice dictates that multiple staff share these functions.

DeSoto ISD leadership should work with the foundation board to restructure the district's education foundation so that the organization increases revenue and profits and employs the appropriate internal controls to sustain itself as a financially viable and beneficial organization. The foundation board and the superintendent should collaborate to outline the board's role and responsibilities to ensure that the foundation maximizes revenues and net income to improve the percentage of contributions used to support the district's educational efforts. Additionally, the leadership for financial viability should evaluate the foundation's individual fund-raising initiatives. The foundation should develop and implement appropriate financial and administrative internal controls to protect against risk of fraud and potential mismanagement of resources.

The district could implement this recommendation with existing resources.

FISCAL IMPACT

Some of the recommendations provided in this report are based on state or federal laws, rules, or regulations, and should be promptly addressed. Other recommendations are based on comparisons to state or industry standards, or accepted best practices, and should be reviewed to determine the level of priority, appropriate timeline, and method of implementation.

RECOMMENDATION	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	TOTAL 5-YEAR (COSTS) OR SAVINGS	ONE-TIME (COSTS) OR SAVINGS
CHAPTER 3. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT							
22. Reassign the district's parent engagement, after-school program, and education foundation functions to other departments to ensure appropriate management and oversight.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
23. Develop and implement a process to evaluate the district's use of volunteers to ensure the volunteers are appropriately assigned to areas with priority need.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
24. Develop and refine strategies to improve media communication and raise awareness of the district's academic and social support programs.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
25. Identify and secure community partners to permanently fund the district's after-school program.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
26. Work with the foundation board to restructure the district's education foundation so that the organization increases revenue and profits and employs the appropriate internal controls to sustain itself as a financially viable and beneficial organization.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
TOTAL	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**

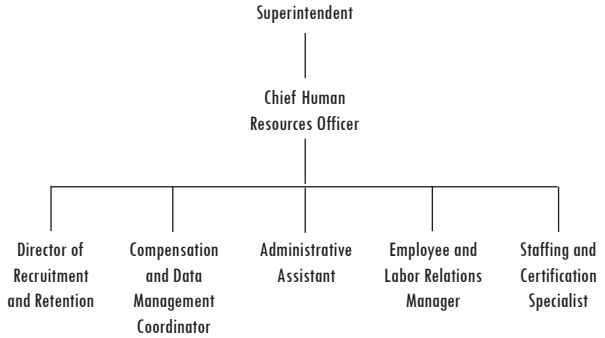
CHAPTER 4. HUMAN RESOURCES

An independent school district's human resources function is responsible for the management of staff. This function is critical because compensation and benefits account for approximately 80 percent of the average Texas school district's total budget. Human resource management is dependent on the organizational structure of the district. Larger districts may have staff dedicated to human resource management, while smaller districts assign staff these responsibilities as a secondary assignment.

Human resource management includes compensation and benefits; recruitment, hiring, and retention; administrative planning and duties; records management; staff relations and grievances; and staff evaluations. Functions are defined by either compliance-based or strategic-based responsibilities. Compliance-based responsibilities include assuring an organization is following federal, state, and local labor laws in areas such as benefits, compensation, and hours worked, records management, mandatory leave, discrimination, medical privacy, safety, termination, and eligibility to work. Strategic-based responsibilities include recruiting and retention, compensation and benefits, and staff relations.

DeSoto Independent School District (ISD) has a centralized human resource function led by the chief human resources officer and supported by five full-time staff. **Figure 4–1** shows the district's Human Resources Department organization.

FIGURE 4–1
DESOTO ISD HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATION
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

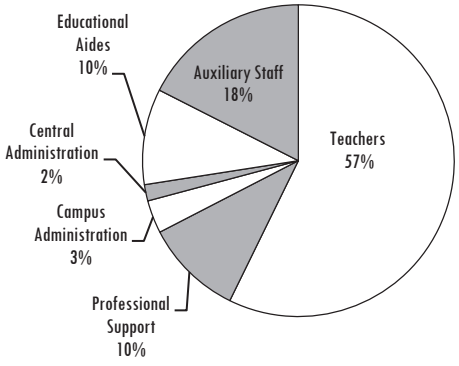


SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Chief Human Resources Officer, February 2015.

DeSoto ISD's Human Resources Department has taken measures to place structure around human resource functions, provide consistent processing, and enhance customer service. These measures include restructuring the department and cross-training human resources staff; streamlining the hiring process to shorten hiring timeframes; enforcing position control hiring only for vacant positions; approving funding for salary increases; revising salary schedules for consistency within the same pay scale for similar functions; and implementing a recruiting and retention function.

Figure 4–2 shows the district's staff composition for school year 2013–14. DeSoto ISD employed 1,003 individuals in school year 2013–14 and provided benefits to every employee required to work 10 or more hours per week. The district's total payroll costs are approximately 83 percent of general fund appropriations. Teachers comprised 57 percent of the district's employees, auxiliary staff (maintenance, custodians, food service, and security) comprised 18 percent, and educational aides and professional support both comprised 10 percent. Central and campus administration comprised the remaining 5 percent of the total employee count.

FIGURE 4–2
DESOTO ISD STAFF COMPOSITION
SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14



SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Report, February 2015.

Figure 4–3 shows a staff composition of DeSoto ISD and its peer and surrounding districts. Peer districts are Texas school districts similar to DeSoto ISD used for comparison purposes. DeSoto ISD's composition of 57 percent teaching staff is higher than its peers, and its composition of 18 percent auxiliary staff is lower than its peers. The comparison between peer districts shows DeSoto ISD allocates more general fund revenue toward teaching than peer districts.

DeSoto ISD contracts with the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) policy service to assist in developing and maintaining board policies to govern the district. The district has two board policies governing employee evaluations. Board Policy DNB (LEGAL) requires a written evaluation annually or more frequently of each superintendent, principal, supervisor, school counselor, or other full-time, certified professional employee, and nurse. Board Policy DN (LOCAL) requires that all district employees receive periodic appraisals for their job performance.

In school year 2013–14, the Human Resources Department updated all of the district's job descriptions. The job descriptions serve as the basis for employee evaluations and job vacancy postings. The district uses an online employment application system that is a module of the enterprise resource planning (ERP) system. This system integrates with the financial and human resource modules of the district's Total Education Administrative Management Solution (TEAMS) system. This system enables the district to maintain position control to ensure each position advertised and filled is for a vacancy linked to a funding source in the district's approved budget. The online application system also automates the employee hiring process from the position posting request to applicant tracking, screening, interview, and employment activities. Principals stated during interviews and focus groups that the new online application system helped to streamline the hiring process and that human resources staff responds promptly to their questions and needs.

The district provides many training opportunities for new teachers and counselors. The district's Curriculum and Instruction Department is responsible for teacher and counselor training. The Curriculum and Instruction Department conducted a professional development audit to determine training needs and then developed training activities based upon the results. For example, content supervisors provide professional development for teachers at the beginning of the year and throughout the year based on requests from principals and district data analysis.

DeSoto ISD has a full-time position in the Human Resources Department dedicated to recruiting and retention. The director of recruitment and retention works with school principals, program directors, and administrators to identify staffing needs, and then recruits to fill these positions. Recruiting takes place through attending job fairs, hosting job fairs, using job search engines, and advertising on professional association websites. Development activities include a teacher-mentoring program and various training activities. Examples of recruitment and development activities include:

- job fair: In school year 2014–15, the Human Resources Department invited potential candidates they previously met and prescreened for background checks and credential verification. The process allowed principals to proceed with job offers upon interview completion and resulted in the hiring of three teachers; and
- new teacher mentoring program: This program was originally grant-funded, and when funds expired, the Human Resources Department continued to offer the program with experienced teachers volunteering as mentors. The mentoring program consists of monthly meetings where respective subject matter experts present different topics. While the meetings

FIGURE 4–3
DESOTO ISD STAFF COMPOSITION COMPARED TO PEER AND SURROUNDING DISTRICTS SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TEACHERS	PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT	CAMPUS ADMINISTRATION	CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION	EDUCATIONAL AIDES	AUXILIARY STAFF	TOTAL STAFF
DeSoto ISD	**57%**	**10%**	**3%**	**2%**	**10%**	**18%**	**1,003**
Fort Worth ISD	53%	13%	3%	0.4%	8%	22%	9,775
Dallas ISD	53%	14%	3%	1%	10%	20%	18,430
Temple ISD	52%	9%	3%	2%	10%	24%	1,147
Arlington ISD	51%	10%	2%	1%	11%	25%	8,055

NOTE: Totals may not sum due to rounding.
SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Report, February 2015.

are voluntary, they average a 97 percent attendance rate. According to the chief human resources officer, the mentoring program contributed to a new teacher retention rate of 75 percent.

These recruiting activities provide the district opportunities to compete for limited qualified teachers, and the mentoring program helps the district develop and retain new teachers.

ACCOMPLISHMENT

- DeSoto ISD has a rigorous substitute teacher qualification and training program.

FINDINGS

- DeSoto ISD has a high teacher turnover rate and has collected data related to staff turnover during exit interviews, but the district has not developed a comprehensive plan for how to increase teacher retention rates.
- DeSoto ISD has implemented an ineffective, informal practice to determine employee pay increases that results in inequities across positions.
- DeSoto ISD has not implemented a standardized system that ensures the Human Resources Department properly maintains and updates personnel files.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 27: Implement strategies to attract and retain qualified staff using information gathered during district employees' exit interviews to address concerns, increase staff morale, and foster an environment that promotes job satisfaction and retention.**
- **Recommendation 28: Develop a consistent compensation plan, communicate the plan to district employees, and establish business practices to obtain a formal compensation study regularly.**
- **Recommendation 29: Develop and implement a personnel file checklist to use for all district employee files, and establish a project to review and update files of all active employees.**

DETAILED ACCOMPLISHMENT

SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS

DeSoto ISD has a rigorous substitute teacher qualification and training program. The district instituted several measures to enhance the qualifications and training of substitute teachers. The district requires all substitute teachers to complete an online training module and pay a $25 fee before the district adds their names to the list of allowed substitutes. Additionally, every individual approved for substitute teaching must attend the annual orientation session during which staff from the Curriculum and Instruction Department presents topics and expectations. The Human Resources Department also conducts a voluntary-attendance, substitute training session once per semester. Subject matter experts from various departments present topics for each session, such as substitute teacher expectations, classroom management, and administrative processes. These activities assist in providing substitute teachers with the knowledge and skills to effectively manage a classroom during a teacher's absence.

DETAILED FINDINGS

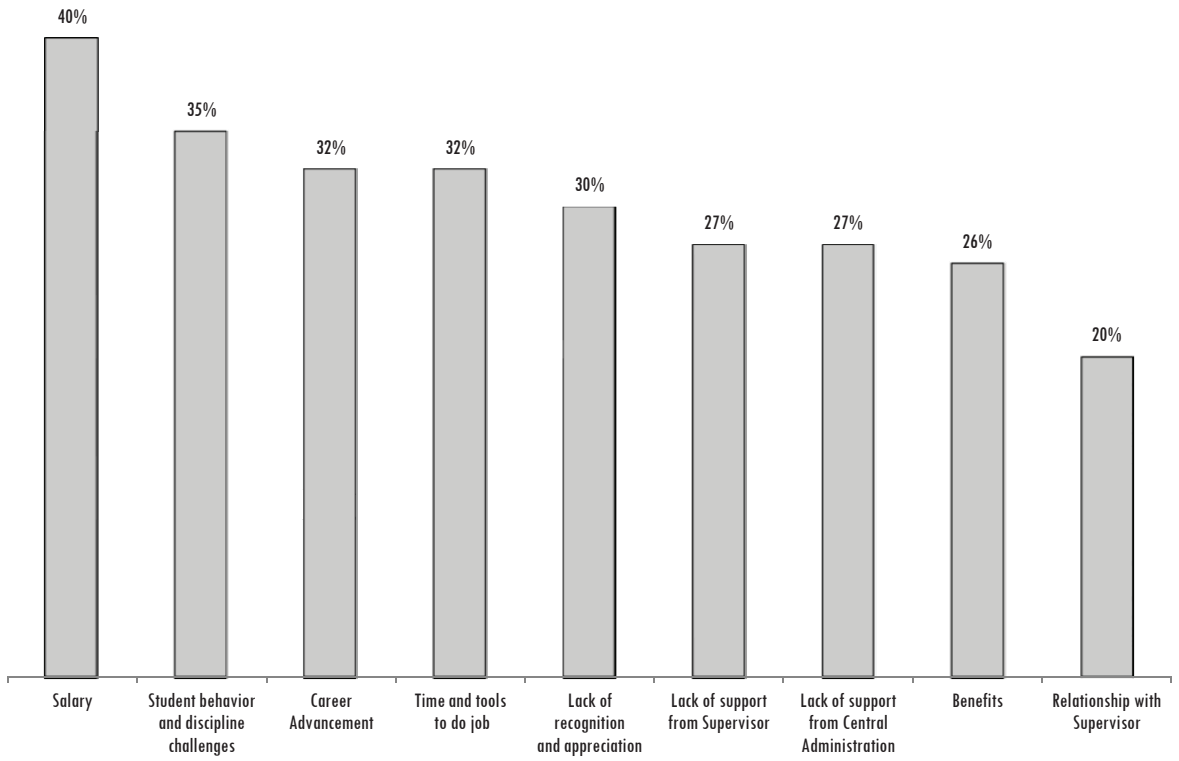
STAFF TURNOVER (REC. 27)

Desoto ISD has a high teacher turnover rate and has collected data related to staff turnover during exit interviews, but the district has not developed a comprehensive plan for how to increase teacher retention rates.

In school year 2013–14, DeSoto ISD Human Resources Department staff began conducting exit interviews and providing separating employees with an electronic survey to complete. The survey asks the respondents to indicate the degree to which selected factors influenced their decision to leave DeSoto ISD.

Figure 4–4 shows the factors that rated a score of 20 percent or higher as a decision factor. All employees, including teachers, were included in the exit interviews. Each question is scored separately; for example, of the 85 respondents indicating decision factors, 40 percent responded that salary was the most or very important influence. Student behavior and discipline challenges rated the second highest deciding factor.

FIGURE 4–4
DESOTO ISD EMPLOYEE SEPARATION DECISION FACTORS
SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14



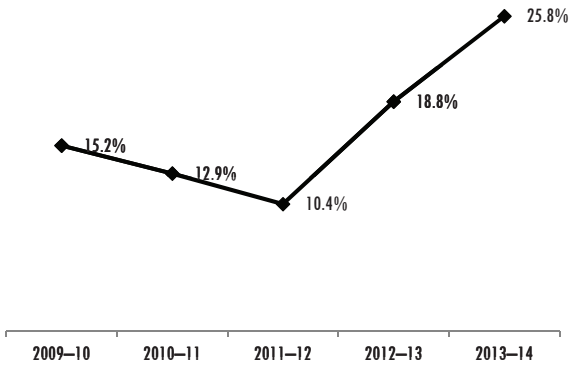
SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Human Resources Exit Survey Response Report, February 2015.

Figure 4–5 shows DeSoto ISD's teacher turnover rates for school years 2009–10 to 2013–14. From 2009–10 to 2011–12, the teacher turnover rate decreased approximately 5 percent. However, between 2011–12 and 2013–14, the district's teacher turnover rate increased approximately 16 percent.

The consequence of high teacher turnover is that DeSoto ISD now has a high percentage of teachers with minimal teaching experience. The benefits of having newer teachers include lower salaries, fresh ideas, and new teaching concepts in the classroom. However, the additional resources required to mentor, train, and support new teachers often outweigh these benefits. **Figure 4–6** shows that 37 percent of the district's teachers had five or less years of teaching experience during school year 2013–14.

Figure 4–7 shows that DeSoto ISD's teachers' years of experience follow the teacher turnover rates. As a result, the percentage of teachers with one to five years of experience has decreased since school year 2011–12, while the percent of beginning teachers increased during the same period.

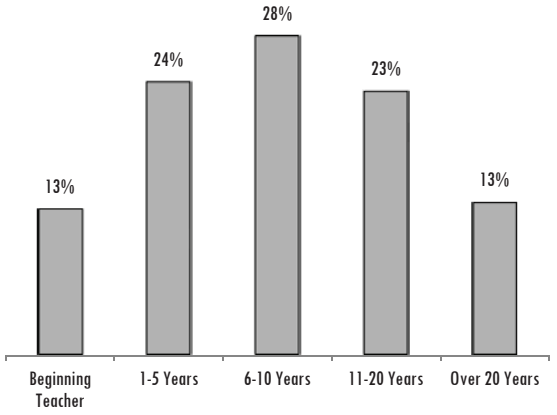
FIGURE 4–5
DESOTO ISD TEACHER TURNOVER RATES
SCHOOL YEARS 2009–10 TO 2013–14



SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Report, February 2015.

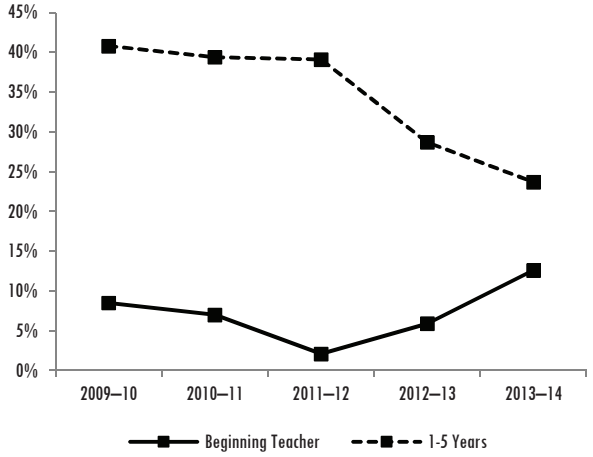
Figure 4–8 shows DeSoto ISD's 26 percent teacher turnover rate in school year 2013–14 was the second highest among its peers and surrounding school districts. It was also higher than the averages within Texas Regional Education Service

FIGURE 4–6
DESOTO ISD TEACHER EXPERIENCE
SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14



SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Report, February 2015.

FIGURE 4–7
DESOTO ISD TEACHERS' YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
SCHOOL YEARS 2009–10 TO 2013–14



SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Report, February 2015.

Center 10 (Region 10) (18 percent) and the state (16 percent). Sharyland ISD, a DeSoto ISD peer district selected for comparison purposes for this review, experienced an 8 percent teacher turnover rate during school year 2013–14.

DeSoto ISD's close proximity to larger school districts offering higher salaries and more career growth opportunities results in strong competition for qualified teachers. These competitive factors affect DeSoto ISD's teacher turnover rates. DeSoto ISD's teacher turnover rate decreased from 15 percent in school year 2009–10 to 10 percent in school year 2011–12. This positive trend in teacher retention reversed, starting in school year 2012–13 when the turnover rate increased to 19 percent, and it increased again in school year 2013–14 when the teacher turnover rate was reported at 26 percent. According to district staff, some of the increase relates to teachers leaving the district due to changes in the academic programs and increased accountability for student achievement. However, the number one reason cited by principals and teachers during interviews that contributed to teacher turnover was that Desoto ISD salaries are significantly lower than districts in the surrounding area. However, while the district has been collecting exit interview data, at the date of the onsite review, the administration has not taken steps of corrective action on issues identified by former staff during the separation process.

Teacher stability is a key component of providing students with a quality education. High teacher turnover requires school districts to identify, hire, and train new teachers. These efforts jeopardize academic continuity and place additional burden on existing resources.

High teacher turnover increases human resources staff workloads, because recruiting efforts must increase, documents must be processed for teachers who leave, and new teachers have to be hired, processed, and trained.

Out of all peers and districts surrounding DeSoto ISD, Sharyland ISD has the lowest teacher turnover rate. The district attributes the low turnover rate to teacher job satisfaction, their desire to work for the district, and the following:

- block scheduling in the junior high and high schools, which gives teachers a lower student count per class;
- high student performance on state testing;
- high level of parental involvement;
- competitive stipends; for example a coach's base annual salary is $56,000, but with stipends, the annual salary is $90,000;
- closed district: students can only enroll if they live in their attendance zones or they are the children of employees; and
- opening of a new high school to provide a more manageable number of students in the school.

FIGURE 4–8
DESOTO ISD TEACHER TURNOVER RATE COMPARED TO PEERS, REGION 10, AND STATE SCHOOL YEARS 2009–10 TO 2013–14

DISTRICT	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14
Cedar Hill ISD	15%	17%	24%	26%	27%
DeSoto ISD	**15%**	**13%**	**10%**	**19%**	**26%**
Temple ISD	17%	16%	17%	20%	25%
Dallas ISD	9%	9%	12%	18%	22%
Fort Worth ISD	13%	12%	14%	15%	15%
Arlington ISD	8%	9%	10%	11%	12%
Sharyland ISD	8%	8%	8%	10%	8%
Region 10	12%	12%	12%	16%	18%
State	12%	12%	13%	15%	16%

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Report, February 2015.

DeSoto ISD should implement strategies to attract and retain qualified staff using information gathered during district employees' exit interviews to address concerns, increase staff morale, and foster an environment that promotes job satisfaction and retention.

The chief human resources officer should organize a task force to develop a comprehensive teacher retention plan that employs strategies aimed at targeting specific concerns identified through employee exit interviews. The chief human resources officer should present the strategies to the superintendent for prioritization and Board of Trustees approval.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

SALARY SCHEDULE (REC. 28)

DeSoto ISD has implemented an ineffective, informal practice to determine staff pay increases that results in inequities across positions.

In fall 2014, DeSoto ISD retained the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) to perform a comprehensive pay system review. The district received the study findings in January 2015. This study noted that DeSoto ISD teacher pay is about 7 percent below market average. The study also noted that the district's average teacher experience of eight years is below the state's median teacher experience, and 61 percent of the district's new teacher hires have less than six years of experience. TASB recommended adjusting teacher salaries and the placement schedule.

Before the 2014 TASB pay system review, DeSoto ISD Human Resources Department staff conducted informal annual salary studies during the budget preparation period to determine salary adjustments for the subsequent year. These informal studies consisted mainly of reviewing salary schedules on neighboring school district websites or calling peer districts. The informal studies do not capture all positions nor do they identify all salary components, such as the number of workdays and hours, extra-duty pay, or stipends. The informal studies also do not include benefits, such as health-care contributions.

Additionally, the district previously established new pay grades for some positions either to keep certain employees in the district or to provide select employees with pay raises. The district has had a practice of increasing salaries for high-demand or hard-to-fill positions while not increasing traditional positions at the same percentage. The practice of adjusting pay schedules for some positions based on the informal salary study, establishing new pay grades for some positions, and increasing salaries for high-demand or hard-to-fill positions has contributed to salary inequities. **Figure 4–9** shows examples of inequities identified in the salary review.

Recent measures taken by the district to provide employees with pay increases and become more competitive with surrounding school districts have not fully addressed the district's salary inequities. The district gave pay raises to some teachers and district staff, while some staff categories did not receive pay raises due to budget constraints. DeSoto ISD's employees continue to express concerns about low salaries compared with surrounding school districts and salary

FIGURE 4–9
DESOTO ISD SALARY STUDY INEQUITIES
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

EMPLOYEE CLASSIFICATION	TASB FINDING(S)
Teachers	Salaries overall are approximately 7 percent below market value.
	Top pay is the only segment where DeSoto ISD salaries are above market value data.
Administrative professionals	High school counselor salaries and high school principal salaries are below market value.
Administrative/Support	The PEIMS coordinator position salary is below market range.
	The high school principal position salary is below market range.
Auxiliary	The following job salaries are below market value: • custodial supervisor; • electrician; • groundskeeper; • HVAC technician; • HVAC supervisor; • plant services supervisor; • painter; • plumber; • mechanic; and • warehouse manager.
Stipends	Athletic positions have higher salary due to high stipends and more added days than surrounding districts.
	Basketball head coaches are paid a $15,000 annual stipend, although the district's pay schedule reflects that they should receive $8,510.
	Basketball head coaches are paid for 226 days, although the market average is 10 days.
	Basketball assistant coaches are paid an extra 10, 15, or 20 days, compared to the market average of 10 days.
	Head varsity coaches receive an $8,510 annual stipend, compared to a market practice of $4,000 to $6,000.
	Football coordinators receive 39 days' stipend pay with no other sports required, although the schedules reflect that they should receive 20 days.
	Middle school tennis coaches are employed year-round and receive two stipends per year.
	The varsity cheerleading director's salary is high compared to market average, and the position receives 20 extra-duty days. Only five other districts in the region pay stipends for this position, and they average 10 extra-duty days.
	Agriculture science is low-paid due to receiving 14 less extra-duty days than peers.

NOTES: PEIMS=Texas Education Agency, Public Education Information Management System; HVAC=heating/ventilation/air conditioning.
SOURCE: Texas Association of School Boards' (TASB) DeSoto ISD Pay System Review Draft, January 2015.

inequities within the district. Based on interviews with the superintendent and the chief human resources officer, some of the concerns are attributable to staff perception that has persisted in the district despite instances where DeSoto ISD salaries are higher than other districts in the area. The superintendent stated that the administration has been working to address the salary inequities. However, the district has not developed a sustained, consistent method to communicate the actions taken or the district's plan that employees could expect regarding salary levels. The primary communication at the time of the onsite review was to answer employee questions and post salary schedules on the district website.

The Board of Trustees heard the study results during its March 2015 meeting and adopted the recommendations presented. According to the superintendent, the district plans to implement the salary recommendations during the next budget year.

Employee compensation has a large effect on employee morale and retention. As such, developing and implementing a competitive compensation structure is a critical area of human resource management. To be effective, compensation must be fair, competitive in the market, accurately based, motivating, and easy to understand. The most effective way to ensure that salaries and total compensation remain competitive is to conduct formal compensation studies regularly. Human resource industry professionals typically perform a formal compensation study at least once every five years.

DeSoto ISD should develop a consistent compensation plan, communicate the plan to district staff, and establish business practices to obtain a formal compensation study regularly. The compensation study should consist of a review of all job functions' responsibilities, analysis of the district's classification system and schedules, comparison of actual salaries to the established salary schedules, and benchmarking district salaries to peer districts.

The chief human resources officer should conduct a formal compensation study every five years and work with the district's Communications Department to develop a compensation communications plan that describes the district's salary structure, competitiveness, and planned actions. The communications plan should include communication messages, communication media, and communication frequency. The implementation of the compensation communications plan should begin during school year 2015–16 and be distributed at least semiannually during the first two years and annually thereafter. The chief human resources officer should disseminate the plan to all employees and the community. Additionally, the chief human resources officer should update human resource policies to conduct a formal salary study at least once every five years, and then obtain quotes and funding for a formal salary study to be conducted during school year 2019–20.

The fiscal impact assumes the district would conduct a formal salary study every five years beginning in school year 2019–20. Based on the district's recent TASB Pay System Review Draft, the cost to implement this recommendation is $17,500.

PERSONNEL FILES (REC. 29)

DeSoto ISD has not implemented a standardized system that ensures the Human Resources Department properly maintains and updates personnel files.

DeSoto ISD's personnel files were converted to an electronic filing system during school year 2013–14 by an outside vendor that provides the new electronic documentation. At the time of the onsite review, the system contained all district personnel files. Designated human resources staff produces a hard copy of the items needed for each new employee's personnel file, scans the documents, and marks them as scanned. The district shreds the hard-copy documents at the end of each school year.

The file conversion process posed challenges, such as documents being assigned to a folder labeled "miscellaneous," which made it difficult to locate specific documents. However, the vendor who handled the project is working to correct these problems.

DeSoto ISD's Human Resources Department does not use a checklist to ensure that all personnel files content is complete and standardized. The vendor that worked on the electronic filing system did not have a checklist of documents that staff are supposed to scan and include in each personnel file. The vendor scanned whatever files had been included within each file. During the onsite review, when reviewing a select group of personnel files by using a link provided by the Human Resources Department, the contents of the personnel folders were not consistent. Some folders contained items such as requests for medical leave, pay schedule reports, district calendars, professional development certificates, and acknowledgement of receipt forms. Other folders did not contain essential personnel information such as the following:

- copy of drivers license;
- copy of Social Security card;
- I–9 form; and
- evaluation record.

The district has two distinct employee evaluation systems. The online teacher evaluation system is a structured and comprehensive process. All other employees receive an annual manual evaluation. Each department's supervisor maintains copies of their staff's evaluations. At the time of the onsite review, the chief human resources officer indicated that the department is developing an employee evaluation process that requires submission of all employee evaluations to the Human Resources Department, and the department would maintain the information in the employee's personnel file instead of within the individual departments.

Figure 4–10 shows a comparison of TASB's recommended personnel file contents to DeSoto ISD's personnel files. Although the district maintains some of the recommended documents in the files, others are infrequent or nonexistent.

FIGURE 4–10
DESOTO ISD PERSONNEL FILES COMPARED TO TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BOARDS (TASB) RECOMMENDATIONS SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

TASB'S RECOMMENDED PERSONNEL FILE CONTENT	DESOTO ISD
State Requirements	
Signed employment contracts, TAC §153.1021(b)	Yes
Credentials (certificates and licenses), TAC §153.1021(b)	Yes
Teacher service records (i.e., TEA form FIN–115 or similar format), TAC §153.1021(b)	Yes
Teaching schedules or other assignment records, TAC §153.1021(b)	No
Teacher performance evaluation, TEC §21.352	Sometimes
Absence from duty reports, TAC §153.1021(b) and federal Family Medical Leave Act	Sometimes
Criminal history record information: must be obtained and reviewed; however, the district may not maintain a copy on file after the information is used	No
University Interscholastic League (UIL) Professional Acknowledgement Form	No
Records of adult education staff qualifications and professional development, TAC, Title 19, §89.25(a)(6)	No
Record of current certification in first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), use of an automated external defibrillator (AED), and health safety training for certain employees, TEC §22.902 (c)	No
Federal Requirements	
Documentation of highly qualified status and parental notifications, No Child Left Behind Act	Sometimes
Alcohol and drug screening test results and information for bus drivers from previous employers, Omnibus Employee Testing Act of 1991	No
Social Security statement (employment not covered), Form SSA–1945	No
Leaves and absences reports and documentation, Family and Medical Leave Act	Sometimes
Exempt and nonexempt employee records, including timesheets, Fair Labor Standards Act	No
Payroll withholding forms	No
Local Requirements (Suggested)	
Employment applications	Yes
References	No
Transcripts	Yes
Performance appraisal records for employees other than teachers	Sometimes
Personnel action memorandums and forms, including annual salary statement, benefits enrollment and beneficiary designation, leave authorization forms, performance awards, letters, and orders from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the U.S. Office of the Attorney General	Yes
Letters of reasonable assurance (for noncontract employees only)	Yes
Personal identification data and emergency contact information	Sometimes
Acknowledgement forms for receipt of specific documents, including employment policies, employee handbook, acceptable use policy	Yes
Documentation of attendance at staff development	Yes

NOTES: TAC=The Texas Administrative Code; TEA=Texas Education Agency; TEC=the Texas Education Code.
Some items such as absence from duty forms, criminal history reports, medical leave, payroll documents, and drug/alcohol testing are typically kept by school districts in a separate location.
SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, February 2015; Texas Association of School Boards Human Resources Library, Organizing Personnel Records, September 2010.

The lack of file documentation consistency makes it difficult to maintain accurate and consistent records for compliance with federal, state, and local laws and regulations. Maintaining accurate records could also reduce litigation exposure, protect employees, and improve processing efficiency.

To ensure consistency and compliance of personnel files, Round Rock ISD and Frisco ISD use the following guidelines:

- determine appropriate and consistent contents for each folder;
- establish a checklist for each folder based upon content needs;
- establish a naming convention for each document to reduce confusion;
- include a date next to the name of the document to make accessing them more efficient; and
- clean up folders before scanning documents.

DeSoto ISD should develop and implement a personnel file checklist to use for all district employee files, and establish a project to review and update files of all active employees.

The chief human resources officer should develop and implement a checklist for every personnel file folder to ensure that each personnel file contains the required documentation for all positions and any documents that may be required based on the position. For example, teachers must have a valid teaching certificate, yet this is not required for an administrative assistant and therefore would not be included in the administrative assistant's personnel file. After the checklist is developed, all Human Resources Department staff should use the established personnel file checklist when establishing and updating employee files. The district should develop and implement the use of the checklist during school year 2015–16.

The chief human resources officer should initiate a project to review all electronic files, compare the contents to the established checklist, obtain missing documents, and purge unnecessary documents. This process would require the Human Resources Department to notify employees to provide missing documents. The department should scan the documents attached to the electronic personnel file of each employee, and check them against the checklist. The department should complete the personnel folder review and update project by the end of school year 2015–16. Additionally, the chief human resources officer should establish business procedures to conduct a review of all personnel folders on a regular basis.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

FISCAL IMPACT

Some of the recommendations provided in this report are based on state or federal laws, rules, or regulations, and should be promptly addressed. Other recommendations are based on comparisons to state or industry standards, or accepted best practices, and should be reviewed to determine the level of priority, appropriate timeline, and method of implementation.

RECOMMENDATION	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	TOTAL 5-YEAR (COSTS) OR SAVINGS	ONE-TIME (COSTS) OR SAVINGS
CHAPTER 4. HUMAN RESOURCES							
27. Implement strategies to attract and retain qualified staff using information gathered during district employees' exit interviews to address concerns, increase staff morale, and foster an environment that promotes job satisfaction and retention.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
28. Develop a consistent compensation plan, communicate the plan to district staff, and establish business practices to obtain a formal compensation study regularly.	$0	$0	$0	$0	($17,500)	($17,500)	$0
29. Develop and implement a personnel file checklist to use for all district employee files, and establish a project to review and update files of all active employees.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
TOTAL	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**($17,500)**	**($17,500)**	**$0**

CHAPTER 5. FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

An independent school district's facilities program is responsible for providing safe and clean learning environments. A school district's facilities include campuses, buildings, grounds, athletic facilities, portable buildings, and supplement facilities (e.g., storage, warehouses). Facilities management includes planning for facilities use, construction of projects, and maintenance of infrastructure (e.g., electrical, plumbing, irrigation, heating and cooling).

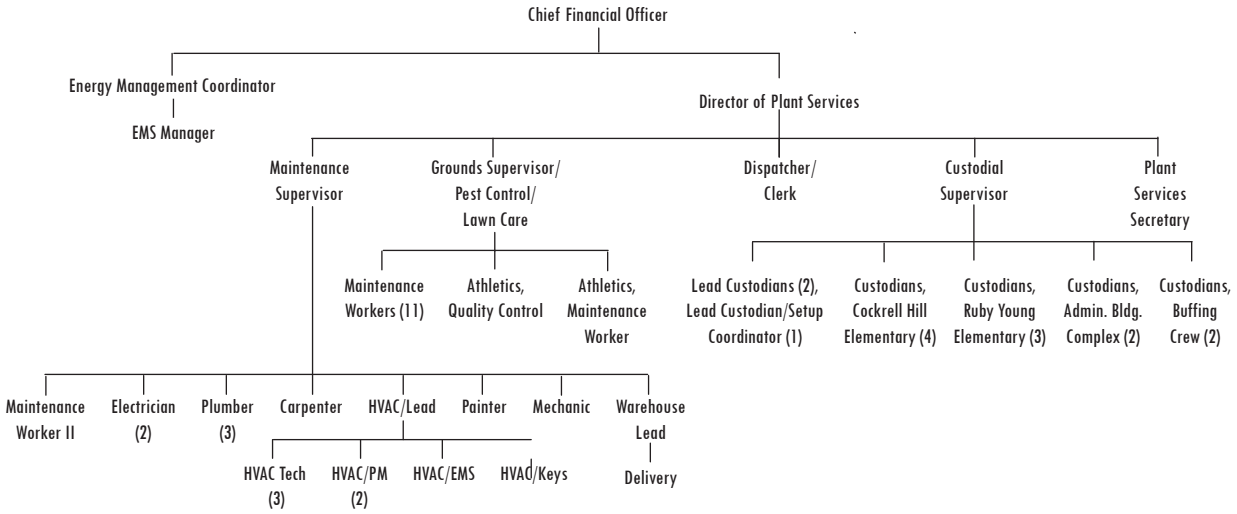
Managing facilities is dependent on a district's organizational structure. Larger districts typically have staff dedicated to support facilities management, while smaller districts may have staff with dual roles. For example, staff may be responsible for custodial and groundskeeping tasks. Facilities planning establishes district priorities, allocates resources and funds, and identifies milestones. Planning is based on student enrollment, campus and building capacity, condition of facilities, curriculum needs, and state regulations. Management of construction and maintenance projects should include contract management, cost control, and a project schedule with defined milestones. Facilities maintenance requires a program for planned maintenance of facilities and equipment and routine cleaning of facilities to ensure a safe environment for students and staff.

DeSoto Independent School District's (ISD) Plant Services Department includes maintenance, grounds, and custodial staff. The Plant Services Department's duties include facility and grounds maintenance, pest control management, remodeling, and construction. Leading the department is the director of plant services, who reports to the chief financial officer (CFO). The CFO also supervises the Energy Management Department. The energy management coordinator leads that department.

DeSoto ISD's facilities include 12 campuses, an administration building, and six other facilities. DeSoto ISD has seven elementary schools, three middle schools, a freshman campus, and one high school.

Figure 5–1 shows the organization of DeSoto ISD's Plant Services and Energy Management Departments.

FIGURE 5–1
DESOTO ISD
PLANT SERVICES AND ENERGY MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENTS ORGANIZATION
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15



NOTES: HVAC=Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning; PM=Preventive Maintenance; EMS=Energy Management System.
SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, February 2015; DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

In 2005, DeSoto ISD passed a $116 million bond package that included funds for a new middle school, a new elementary school, campus renovations, expansions at the high school and Ruby Young Elementary School, land purchases, and technology enhancements. After the bond package passed, the district began a reorganization of the facilities. The new middle school, Curtistene S. McCowan Middle School, opened in 2007. The existing intermediate schools—Amber Terrace and the Meadows—became elementary schools, and all the elementary schools began to include grade five, whereas previously the elementary schools included only up to grade four. East and West junior high schools became middle schools.

In 2011, DeSoto ISD broke ground on an expansion of the high school, adding more than 165,000 square feet of classroom and practical learning areas to the campus. The district continues to use the bond proceeds to fund new construction, major and minor renovation projects at existing facilities, land purchases, and other capital improvements throughout the district. The district issued $84.2 million of the bonds as of school year 2013–14. The district plans to use the remaining bonds to fund a natatorium at the high school and a new elementary school, but these bonds have not yet been issued.

Figure 5–2 shows the district's facility inventory. DeSoto ISD's facilities total about 1.8 million square feet, with the DeSoto High School as the largest facility.

FIGURE 5–2
DESOTO ISD FACILITY INVENTORY
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

FACILITY	YEAR BUILT	CLASSROOMS, GYM, ETC., SQUARE FOOTAGE	OTHER SQUARE FOOTAGE	ATHLETIC FACILITIES SQUARE FOOTAGE	PORTABLES SQUARE FOOTAGE	TOTAL SQUARE FOOTAGE
Elementary Schools						
The Meadows	1987	60,744	12,021			72,765
Amber Terrace	1980	64,086	16,911		3,072	84,069
Northside	1971	58,724			3,072	61,796
Frank D. Moates	1987	60,000	13,200		3,072	76,272
Ruby Young	1971	73,601	6,324		3,072	82,997
Cockrell Hill	1988	60,000	16,400			76,400
Woodridge	2003	73,633			3,072	76,705
Middle Schools						
Curtistene S. McCowan	2007	171,875				171,875
DeSoto West	1988	116,724			4,608	121,332
DeSoto East	1963	118,756			7,680	126,436
High Schools						
DeSoto High	1976, 2012	463,274		92,976		556,250
DeSoto Freshman Campus	1997	108,105	45,221			153,326

FIGURE 5-2 (CONTINUED)
DESOTO ISD FACILITY INVENTORY
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

FACILITY	YEAR BUILT	CLASSROOMS, GYM, ETC., SQUARE FOOTAGE	OTHER SQUARE FOOTAGE	ATHLETIC FACILITIES SQUARE FOOTAGE	PORTABLES SQUARE FOOTAGE	TOTAL SQUARE FOOTAGE
Other						
Administration Building, Belt Line Center (Conference Center, DAEP)	1955, 1958		77,018			77,018
Service Center	1980		30,504			30,504
Office Building	Not provided		4,800			4,800
Maintenance	Not provided		5,000			5,000
Vocational Agricultural Facility	Not provided		10,000		1,536	11,536
Multipurpose Athletic Facility	1997		14,926	24,840		39,766
Total		**1,429,522**	**252,325**	**117,816**	**29,184**	**1,828,847**

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

ACCOMPLISHMENT

- DeSoto ISD implemented energy-saving initiatives to conserve energy and promote energy-saving habits among teachers and students.

FINDINGS

- DeSoto ISD's Plant Services Department lacks a process to ensure a consistent level of quality in custodial operations.
- DeSoto ISD does not fully leverage the functionality and features of its computerized work order management system to plan, monitor, and assess the effectiveness of maintenance operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 30: Adopt cleanliness standards and establish a practice to monitor the performance of both the contract and district custodians based upon these standards.**
- **Recommendation 31: Optimize the use of the district's work order system to effectively plan preventive maintenance and assess the overall efficiency of the department.**

DETAILED ACCOMPLISHMENT

ENERGY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

DeSoto ISD implemented energy-saving initiatives to conserve energy and promote energy-saving habits among teachers and students.

DeSoto ISD's Energy Management Department is responsible for using available technology and programs to decrease the district's energy consumption and energy costs. The department also uses districtwide initiatives to involve the staff and students in conservation and encourage energy-saving behaviors. The energy-saving measures the department implemented include:

- energy demand response program: in accordance with this program, the district receives payment when it is able to reduce its electrical usage during some peak-demand periods;
- twice-monthly energy audits conducted by the Energy Management Department: the energy management coordinator tracks whether or not campus staff engages in behaviors to decrease energy usage, such as closing doors and turning off lights and computers when not in use; the campus principal receives the audit results by email;

- energy incentive program: based on the results of the energy audits, the elementary school and the secondary school with the best results for each month receive a trophy and a monetary award that goes to the school's general education fund; additionally, the department selects one winner from elementary and secondary schools for the quarter who receives a plaque, a monetary award, a staff breakfast or lunch, and recognition at a Board of Trustees meeting;
- Junior Energy Managers Program: the DeSoto ISD Energy Management Department holds an annual essay contest for students, with one student from each campus selected to be the Junior Energy Manager, who receives use of a computer tablet for energy duties at the school, a T-shirt, and a badge. The student conducts campus audits to ensure doors are closed and lights, monitors, and computers are off, identifies other energy-savings opportunities, reports any abuse or misuse of energy, and helps promote the Energy Program to students and teachers;
- energy management systems: the district uses computer-controlled systems that operate heating, ventilation, and air conditioning units, and automatically turn on and off air conditioning, lights, and boilers according to pre-programmed instructions entered by facilities staff and provide staff with the ability to monitor these functions in real time. The Energy Management Department installed the energy management system in the district; and
- utility bill monitoring: the energy management coordinator reviews the utility bills monthly to ensure accuracy and contacts the utility provider if the coordinator identifies any errors.

These initiatives foster knowledge about energy-saving behaviors among students and staff and could help the district save money through decreased utility usage.

DETAILED FINDINGS

CUSTODIAL OPERATIONS (REC. 30)

DeSoto ISD's Plant Services Department lacks a process to ensure a consistent level of quality in custodial operations.

DeSoto ISD employs 14 full-time district custodial staff who report to the custodial supervisor. The district custodians are responsible for cleaning two elementary schools and the administration buildings. The district has a contract with GCA Services Group's K–12 Education Division for custodial services at the other district facilities. The district began this contract in August 2012. In accordance with the contract, the service provides custodial cleaning services daily to elementary schools and every other day (sometimes referred to as skip cleaning) to secondary schools and other facilities. At the time of the onsite review, the review team learned that the district is in the process of transferring all custodial operations to the contract service provider as district custodians retire or leave the district.

The director of plant services indicated the district conducted a cost-benefit analysis to determine that using the contract service provider would yield a financial gain to the district. However, the district did not have documentation to show the review team the original analysis or any subsequent evaluation of the effectiveness of the contracted service.

The contract for custodial services stipulates a Joint Review Committee consisting of three DeSoto ISD representatives and three representatives from the contract service provider would meet to review the contract service provider's performance quarterly or in whatever timeframe DeSoto ISD prefers. Every two months, campus principals fill out a "Report Card for Custodial Services" to assess the performance of the contract service provider. The principals grade the custodians A to D in the following categories:

- hallways clean (vacuumed if applicable) and floor shiny;
- cafeteria clean and floors shiny;
- classrooms cleaned nightly;
- restrooms cleaned and stocked nightly; and
- management responsiveness to issues.

The form also includes space for the principals to provide additional comments.

DeSoto ISD provided the review team with a sample of the report cards from school years 2013–14 and 2014–15. On these report cards, the principals gave the service provider scores of A or B. Comments on the report cards largely indicated satisfaction with the services, although some comments indicated issues. These comments include:

- the outside portable alarms are not set nightly;
- look at classrooms closer;
- custodian needs assistance, school is too big for one person;
- make sure classrooms are vacuumed daily and restrooms stocked nightly;
- several soap dispensers ran empty for several days, including staff lounge and restrooms; and
- good job, only wish we could clean each room daily.

The contractor tabulates and reports the results of the principals' report cards. District staff was unable to provide the review team with the method used to tabulate the scores, or the formula the district uses to convert the scores from letter grades to numerical ratings. The CFO receives the report cards, but district staff were unable to describe the consequences for unacceptable scores. District staff noted that the district custodial supervisor speaks to the supervisor of the contracted staff if the Plant Services Department receives a work order for a task that is the contract custodians' responsibility.

The custodial supervisor communicates directly with the lead custodian at each campus. The lead custodians reported that they find it easy to communicate with the custodial supervisor and receive any assistance needed. A checklist of daily tasks and cleanliness standards is available to the district custodians, but the custodial supervisor indicated the majority do not use it because they have worked in the district for several years and already have knowledge of the expected tasks. The district does not have a program to assess the cleanliness of the facilities that the district custodians clean and maintain. However, when issues arise, the custodial supervisor noted that campus staff communicates with the lead custodian, who then addresses the problems.

The district periodically reviews the contract custodians' work in the form of the report cards, but the district does not review the district custodians' work in a similar manner. Additionally, the oversight organization of the two custodial staffs is different because the custodial supervisor communicates directly with the district custodians, but communicates with the contract custodians' supervisor, who then passes the information on to the contract custodians as needed. With two separate custodial staffs cleaning facilities on different schedules and separate oversight and review of service levels, the district cannot ensure all of its facilities receive the same level of cleaning.

To ensure consistency, effective districts use a cleanliness standard such as the standard created by APPA: Leadership in Educational Facilities (APPA), a consulting firm specializing in education facilities. APPA identified five levels of cleanliness and identified Level 2: Ordinary Tidiness, as the standard for educational facilities. At level 2:

> Floors and base moldings shine and/or are bright and clean. There is no buildup in corners or along walls, but there can be up to two days' worth of dust, dirt, stains, or streaks. All vertical and horizontal surfaces are clean, but marks, dust, smudges, and fingerprints are noticeable upon close observation. Lights all work and fixtures are clean. Washroom and shower fixtures and tile gleam and are odor-free. Supplies are adequate. Trash containers and pencil sharpeners hold only daily waste, are clean and odor-free.

DeSoto ISD should adopt cleanliness standards and establish a practice to monitor the performance of both the contract and district custodians based upon these standards.

Using the APPA standard, the director of plant services should develop a rubric to determine whether the cleanliness of the facilities is acceptable. The director of plant services should coordinate with the CFO to amend the custodial services contract before the next renewal to add the cleanliness standards rubric to the contract. The director should coordinate with the contract custodian supervisor to train all custodians about the standard and share the rubric. The custodial supervisor should use the rubric to conduct periodic reviews at all the facilities. The custodial supervisor should share the results of the review with the contract custodian supervisor and the lead district custodians. Together, they should reevaluate the cleaning procedures to ensure all facilities meet the cleanliness standards.

Additionally, the CFO should conduct a cost/benefit analysis to ensure the district is using its financial resources efficiently and receives satisfactory services from the contract provider.

Since the time of the onsite review, the board voted to extend the custodial contract and amended it to have the contract custodians clean all the classrooms they are responsible for daily.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

WORK ORDER MANAGEMENT (REC. 31)

DeSoto ISD does not fully leverage the functionality and features of its computerized work order management system to plan, monitor, and assess the effectiveness of maintenance operations.

DeSoto ISD uses SchoolDude maintenance software as its computerized work order management system. The Plant Services Department staff performs maintenance based on work orders that staff submit through the system. The dispatcher/clerk assigns the work order to the appropriate staff. By basing the majority of the maintenance tasks on work orders, the district is engaging in reactive maintenance. Reactive maintenance is the practice of only servicing equipment and facilities components when they malfunction or break. In interviews, staff indicated the district does not have a preventive maintenance plan for the majority of the district facilities and equipment. Preventive maintenance is taking planned actions to retain an item at a specified level of performance by providing repetitive scheduled tasks to prolong system operation and use. These tasks could include inspection, cleaning, lubrication, service and/or replacement conducted at regularly scheduled intervals, based on average statistical or anticipated lifetime or both. One exception to the district's reactive maintenance practice is that the heating/ventilation/air conditioning (HVAC) staff indicated they follow a preventive maintenance plan that includes changing filters, checking belts, greasing motors, and other tasks. However, no documented checklist or report of the results is kept. No other preventive maintenance occurs in the district. The work order management system has the capability to generate recurring work orders for preventive maintenance tasks, but the district does not use this function.

The dispatcher/clerk uses the system to give the director of plant services periodic updates regarding open work orders. If the director wants additional information about the work orders, he requests a copy of the work order summary report. Once a week, the director meets with the maintenance staff to discuss pending projects and work orders. In addition to the work order summary report the district uses, the system can produce other reports. **Figure 5–3** shows a comparison of the most popular reports the system can generate and the reports used in the district. This figure shows that the district only uses one of the eight most popular reports.

FIGURE 5–3
DESOTO ISD WORK ORDER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM REPORT USAGE
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

REPORT	FUNCTIONALITY	USED BY DESOTO ISD
Work Order Summary 2	High-level, all-encompassing summary report.	Yes
	Shows date work order was generated, target completion date, actual completion date, days aged, labor hours, and costs.	
	Helps maintenance managers stay knowledgeable about what is going on in the organization.	
	Report includes the work order status, staff assigned, requester, days aged, total costs, and more.	
	Can be grouped by location, purpose, and who is responsible for the repair; can provide a total for each group and a grand total.	
Location Summary	Breakdown of how resources were allocated to each location.	No
	Tracks labor hours and costs, materials costs, sales tax, total costs, cost per student, and cost per square foot by location.	
	Report provides a summary for each location, including total labor hours and labor costs, material costs, total cost by facility.	
Craft Summary	Breakdown of where resources were spent in relation to the type of work done.	No
	Tracks labor hours and costs, materials costs, sales tax, the number of work orders closed and in progress, average hours per work order, and average cost per work order by craft and location.	
	Report includes the number of hours dedicated to each craft, the number of work orders per craft, and the cost for labor and materials.	
	Includes total percentage of work per craft.	

FIGURE 5–3 (CONTINUED)
DESOTO ISD WORK ORDER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM REPORT USAGE
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

REPORT	FUNCTIONALITY	USED BY DESOTO ISD
Purpose Summary	Tracks and reports how resources were allocated based on the reason why requests were entered into the system.	No
	Report breaks down the number of work orders dedicated to each purpose code, such as preventive maintenance, reactive maintenance, tornado damage, capital request, etc.	
	Includes total labor hours, labor and material costs, average hours, and average cost per work order.	
Detail Employee Cost Report	Tracks and manages the work load of each maintenance employee.	No
	Can generate report for a single employee, a team of employees, or all employees	
	Report provides a breakdown of each employee and the total number of hours they have tracked for a given reporting period.	
	Includes the average number of hours each employee enters per work order, the average number of days it takes them to complete a work order, and the total number of work orders they worked on during the period selected.	
Transaction Detail (export to spreadsheet)	Can open report with spreadsheet software (such as Microsoft Excel) to generate meaningful and powerful charts and tables that illustrate employee's workload, total costs allocated to various vendors and suppliers, etc.	No
	Reports transaction type, description, quantity, cost, location, craft, purpose code, etc.	
Budget Report	Tracks budget status by budget code.	No
	Report shows year-to-date costs from all work orders marked with a specific budget code, beginning budget amount, percentage of budget spent, and remaining fiscal year amounts.	
Emergency Work Order Report	Tracks and manages emergency work orders.	No
	Report shows work order description, location, labor hours, labor cost, inventory cost, and total cost.	

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, SchoolDude System, February 2015.

The district is not using the capabilities of the system to plan recurring maintenance tasks or keep track of maintenance needs and costs. Without using these functionalities, the district is unable to adequately plan for preventive maintenance. This district is also not using the full potential of the system to assess the efficiency of the department or the types of work orders occurring frequently. The February 2003 Planning Guide for Maintaining School Facilities sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics states that a comprehensive facility maintenance program is a school district's foremost tool for protecting its investment in school facilities. Moreover, preventive maintenance is the cornerstone of effective maintenance initiatives. The guide notes: "Breakdown (Reactive) maintenance is not in the best interest of the taxpayer, the maintenance department, or students and staff… On the other hand, regularly scheduled equipment maintenance not only prevents sudden and unexpected equipment failure, but also reduces the overall life-cycle cost of the building."

DeSoto ISD should optimize the use of the district's work order system to effectively plan preventive maintenance and assess the overall efficiency of the department.

The director of plant services should use the capabilities of the work order management system to generate recurring work orders for necessary preventive maintenance tasks so that these tasks could be incorporated into the normal work load of the maintenance staff. The director should also use the reports available through the work order management system to identify any recurring work orders or work orders remaining open more than a few days to assess whether or not there is a need for any additional maintenance.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

FISCAL IMPACT

Some of the recommendations provided in this report are based on state or federal laws, rules, or regulations, and should be promptly addressed. Other recommendations are based on comparisons to state or industry standards, or accepted best practices, and should be reviewed to determine the level of priority, appropriate timeline, and method of implementation.

RECOMMENDATION	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	TOTAL 5-YEAR (COSTS) OR SAVINGS	ONE-TIME (COSTS) OR SAVINGS
CHAPTER 5. FACILITIES MANAGEMENT							
30. Adopt cleanliness standards and establish a practice to monitor the performance of both the contract and district custodians based upon these standards.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
31. Optimize the use of the district's work order system to effectively plan preventive maintenance and assess the overall efficiency of the department.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
TOTAL	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**

CHAPTER 6. FINANCIAL AND RISK MANAGEMENT

An independent school district's financial management function administers a district's financial resources and plans for its priorities. Administration may include budget preparation, accounting and payroll, administrative technology, tax appraisal and collection, and auditing. Planning may include aligning a district's budget with its district and campus priorities, allocating resources, and developing a schedule with milestones.

Financial management is dependent on a district's organizational structure. Larger districts typically have staff dedicated to financial functions, while smaller districts have staff with multiple responsibilities. Budget preparation and administration are critical to overall district operations. Financial management includes budget development and adoption, oversight of expenditure of funds, and involvement of campus and community stakeholders in the budget process. Managing accounting and payroll includes developing internal controls and safeguards, reporting of account balances, and scheduling disbursements to maximize funds. Management of this area includes segregation of duties, use of school administration software systems, and providing staff training. Texas state law requires all school districts to have an external auditor review the district's compliance with established standards and practices. The audit provides an annual financial and compliance report, an examination of the expenditure of Federal Funds, and a report to management on internal accounting controls.

Additionally, an independent school district's asset and risk management function controls costs by ensuring that it is adequately protected against significant losses with the lowest possible insurance premiums. This protection includes the identification of risks and methods to minimize their effects. Risks can include investments, liabilities, capital assets, and insurance.

Managing assets and risks is dependent on the organizational structure of the district. Larger districts typically have staff dedicated to asset and risk management, while smaller districts assign staff these responsibilities as a secondary assignment. Managing investments includes identifying those with maximum interest-earning potential while safeguarding funds and ensuring liquidity to meet fluctuating cash flow demands. Forecasting and managing revenue includes efficient tax collections to allow a district to meet its cash flow needs, earn the highest possible interest, and estimate state and federal funding. Capital asset management should identify a district's property (e.g., buildings, vehicles, equipment) and protect it from theft and obsolescence. Insurance programs cover employees' health, workers' compensation, and district liability.

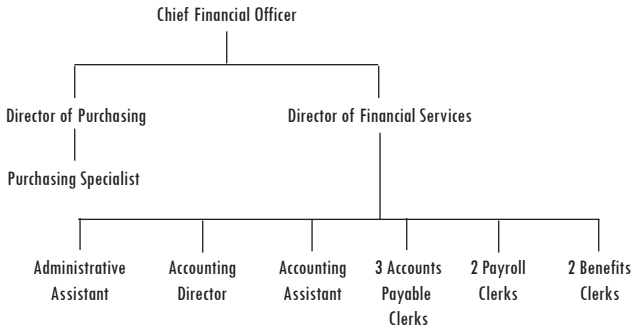
DeSoto ISD's chief financial officer (CFO) leads the district's Business and Finance Services Department. This department includes two finance-related departments: the Financial Services Department and the Purchasing Department. In addition, the CFO is responsible for the child nutrition, plant services, energy management, and employee benefit functions. Six department directors lead these functions and report directly to the CFO. The director of financial services has 10 directly reporting positions, including an administrative assistant, an accounting director, an accounting assistant, three accounts payable clerks, two payroll clerks, and two benefits clerks. The director of purchasing has one direct report, a purchasing specialist.

The CFO has been employed with the district since February 2007. Before working at DeSoto ISD, the CFO was the director of finance for Red Oak ISD, a district located south of Dallas, for 12 years. The director of financial services oversees the Financial Services Department and manages the financial operations of the district's accounts and payroll. The director of financial services has been employed with DeSoto ISD since August 2013. Before joining the district, the director of financial services served with the U.S. Navy as a financial naval officer for 22 years. The CFO and the director of financial services serve as the district's investment officers. As required by the Texas Public Funds Investment Act, Section 2256.008, the director of financial services completed 10 hours of investment training within 12 months of hire. In addition, as investment officers, the CFO and the director of financial services completed 10 hours of investment training during the past two years.

The Business and Finance Services Department budget, excluding the Purchasing Department, for fiscal year 2015 is $1.8 million, which is approximately 3.0 percent of the district's general fund budget of $70.5 million.

Figure 6–1 shows the Business and Finance Services Department organization, which includes the Financial Services Department. This organization does not show the non-finance-related functions that report to the CFO.

FIGURE 6–1
DESOTO ISD BUSINESS AND FINANCE SERVICES ORGANIZATION
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15



SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, March 2015; DeSoto ISD Organization, February 2015.

Between fiscal years 2011 to 2014, actual general fund revenues averaged $60 million per year in fiscal years 2011 to 2013, and increased to $66 million in fiscal year 2014. During that time, actual general fund expenditures fluctuated from a low of $56 million to a high of $67 million per year. Revenues from state sources averaged 64 percent, and revenues from local sources averaged 35 percent. The remaining 1 percent was from federal sources.

During the same period, actual expenditures for instruction and instruction-related services averaged 59.0 percent of total expenditures, expenditures for non-student-based support services averaged 15.0 percent of total expenditures, and student-based support services expenditures averaged 12.0 percent of total expenditures. Instruction and instruction-related services are expenditures incurred directly for classroom teaching. Support services for non-student-based expenditures are for facilities, security, and data processing. Student-based support services expenditures include guidance and counseling, social and health services, transportation, and child nutrition. Administrative support services—which include indirect expenses that support classroom instruction such as human resources, financial services, communications, and purchasing—averaged 4.0 percent of actual expenditures from fiscal years 2011 to 2014.

DeSoto ISD's adopted general fund revenue budget for fiscal year 2015 is $70.8 million, of which 67.0 percent is from state sources, 32.0 percent is from local sources, and 1.0 percent is from federal sources. The adopted general fund expenditure budget for fiscal year 2015 is $70.5 million. The top three budgeted expenditures are for instruction and instruction-related services (58.0 percent), non-student-based support services (15.0 percent), and student-based support services (12.0 percent). Administrative support services make up 4.0 percent of fiscal year 2015 budgeted expenditures.

The district receives its local revenues primarily from property taxes. The district's 2015 total tax rate is $1.47, including $1.04 maintenance and operations and $0.43 debt service (interest and sinking). The Dallas Central Appraisal District appraises property values, and the district uses this appraisal to determine property taxes. The Dallas County Tax Office collects and remits the district's property taxes. The tax assessments for the properties within the district occur annually by January 1 with expected payments by October 1. The tax office considers outstanding assessments delinquent on February 1 of the following year. As of January 2015, 85.0 percent of the district's 2014 levy had been collected through December 2014. The district's average collection rate is 98.0 percent.

Figure 6–2 shows actual general fund revenues and expenditures incurred during fiscal years 2011 to 2014 and budgeted general fund revenues and expenditures for fiscal year 2015 as of the onsite review in February 2015.

Figure 6–3 shows fiscal year 2015 budgeted general fund revenue and expenditure percentages for DeSoto ISD and peer districts. Peer districts are Texas school districts similar to DeSoto ISD that are used for comparison purposes for this review. When compared to the peer districts, DeSoto ISD budget includes a higher percentage of revenue from state sources (67.0 percent compared to an average of 50.0 percent for the peer districts). In fiscal year 2015, DeSoto ISD and Sharyland ISD each budgeted 58.0 percent of their total expenditures for instruction and instructional-related services. This was the highest among the peer districts.

FIGURE 6–2
DESOTO ISD GENERAL FUND FINANCIAL OVERVIEW
FISCAL YEARS 2011 TO 2015

(IN THOUSANDS) CATEGORY	2011 ACTUAL	2012 ACTUAL	2013 ACTUAL	2014 ACTUAL	2015 BUDGET	PERCENTAGE OF ACTUAL (FIVE-YEAR AVERAGE)	PERCENTAGE OF 2015 BUDGET
Revenue							
Local Revenue	$22,726	$22,381	$21,766	$22,014	$22,798	35%	32%
State Revenue	35,495	37,125	37,889	43,745	47,590	64%	67%
Federal Revenue	878	837	254	536	450	1%	1%
Other Revenue	226		150			0%	0%
Total Revenue	**$59,325**	**$60,343**	**$60,059**	**$66,295**	**$70,838**	**100%**	**100%**
Expenditures							
Instruction and Instruction-Related Services	$34,846	$36,735	$33,518	$39,209	$40,588	59%	58%
Instructional and School Leadership	5,811	5,344	4,934	6,302	6,831	9%	10%
Support Services – Student (Pupil)	7,020	7,275	6,880	8,014	8,709	12%	12%
Administrative Support Services	2,708	2,660	2,164	3,108	2,908	4%	4%
Support Services – Non-Student-Based	8,633	8,841	7,976	9,871	10,251	15%	15%
Ancillary Services	61	137	123	102	443	<1%	1%
Debt Service					646	1%	1%
Capital Outlay				220		<1%	<1%
Intergovernmental Charges	63	198	131	145	169	<1%	<1%
Total Expenditures	**$59,142**	**$61,190**	**$55,726**	**$66,971**	**$70,545**	**100%**	**100%**
Revenues over (under) Expenditures	($43)	($847)	$4,183	($676)	$293		

SOURCES: DeSoto ISD, Audited Financial Statements for Actual Amounts, Fiscal Year 2015 Budget for Budgeted Amounts, February 2015.

DeSoto ISD spends a slightly higher percentage of its budget for administrative support services than the peer districts (4.0 percent compared to 3.0 percent for the peers.)

The state's school financial accountability rating system, known as the School Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas (FIRST), rates Texas school districts based on 20 finance-related criteria. DeSoto ISD has received a rating of "Superior Achievement" for the past three years (2011–2013) scoring 70 out of a possible 70 points.

The Financial Allocation Study for Texas (FAST) examines both academic progress and spending for Texas school districts. A district receives a rating of one to five stars indicating its success in producing high academic achievement while maintaining cost-effective operations.

Figure 6–4 shows DeSoto ISD's 2014 FAST ratings compared to peer districts. DeSoto ISD ranks next to last with 2.5 stars relative to its peer districts. Unlike the FIRST ratings, the FAST ratings consider academic progress. Compared to the peer districts, DeSoto ISD has lower academic progress for its low spending level.

DeSoto ISD maintains seven bank accounts at CoAmerica Bank consisting of concentration, general operating, debt service, tax clearing, payroll, capital projects, and student activity accounts. The district maintains five investment pools. As of December 31, 2014, the district's investment portfolio consisted of $43.4 million. Between October and December 2014, the district earned $5,348 on its investment portfolio with interest rates ranging from 0.04 percent to 0.28 percent. District practice dictates that most deposits go directly to the investment pools and then transfer to other accounts as needed.

FIGURE 6-3
DESOTO ISD GENERAL FUND BUDGET REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE PERCENTAGES COMPARED TO PEERS
FISCAL YEAR 2015

CATEGORY	TEMPLE ISD	SHARYLAND ISD	CEDAR HILL ISD	PEER AVERAGE	DESOTO ISD
Revenue					
Local Revenue	52%	38%	55%	48%	**32%**
State Revenue	46%	62%	40%	50%	**67%**
Federal Revenue	2%	1%	5%	3%	**1%**
Total Revenue	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**
Expenditures					
Instruction and Instruction-Related Services	55%	58%	44%	52%	**58%**
Instructional and School Leadership	8%	8%	6%	7%	**10%**
Support Services – Student (Pupil)	12%	15%	15%	14%	**12%**
Administrative Support Services	3%	3%	3%	3%	**4%**
Support Services – Non-Student-Based	12%	13%	14%	13%	**15%**
Ancillary Services	0%	0%	0%	0%	**1%**
Debt Service	1%	2%	17%	6%	**1%**
Capital Outlay	0%	0%	0%	0%	**0%**
Intergovernmental Charges	8%	0%	0%	3%	**0%**
Total Expenditures	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

SOURCES: DeSoto ISD, General Fund Budget Revenue and Expenditure, February 2015; Peer Districts, General Fund Budget Revenue and Expenditure as provided on each district's websites, fiscal year 2015.

FIGURE 6–4
DESOTO ISD FINANCIAL ALLOCATION STUDY FOR TEXAS (FAST) RATING COMPARED TO PEERS
2014

DISTRICT	COMPOSITE PROGRESS PERCENTILE SCORE	SPENDING INDEX SCORE	FAST RATING
Sharyland ISD	96	Average	4 Stars
Cedar Hill ISD	61	Low	4 Stars
DeSoto ISD	**17**	**Low**	**2.5 Stars**
Temple ISD	8	High	1.5 Stars

SOURCE: Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, March 2015.

The director of financial services prepares a cash flow forecast to estimate the district's resources and expenditures for the year. The director uses the forecast to predict when cash shortfalls would occur so the district could transfer funds from the investment pools to cover projected cash shortfalls.

June 30 is the district's fiscal year end. The district received an unqualified opinion on its fiscal year 2014 external audit report. This means that the district's financial statements fairly present DeSoto ISD's financial position and changes in its financial position in accordance with typically accepted accounting principles. Since fiscal year 2008, the district has received an unqualified opinion on its financial statements and has used the same external auditor since fiscal year 2012.

DeSoto ISD obtains property casualty insurance from Lexington Insurance Company through the Frost Insurance Agency. During the past two fiscal years, the district has had two claims against its property casualty policy. In October 2014, McCowan Middle School sustained $183,000 in water damages when a washing machine malfunctioned during the weekend and flooded the gym floor. In April 2014, thieves stole $12,740 in athletic fund proceeds from the high school. The insurance company covered both claims after application of appropriate deductibles. There are no disputed property casualty insurance claims.

The district's workers' compensation insurance is self-funded through Workers' Compensation Solutions (WCS), which is a modified self-funded workers' compensation program established to allow governmental entities to share risks. A risk management company acts as third-party administrator of the program and is responsible for the program's administrative aspects such as processing and reporting

workers' compensation claims. The WCS enables the district to limit its exposure to risks caused by workers' compensation claims. As a participant in the program, the district pays into two separate funds: the maximum loss fund, which pays claims to injured employees; and the fixed cost fund that pays the program's operation expenses. The district accounts for its expenses through an internal service fund, which is a fund that accounts for monies used to provide benefits such as health benefits or workers' compensation claims.

The district's general obligation bond debt as of June 30, 2014, totaled $212.3 million all of which is direct tax-supported debt. DeSoto ISD built in a refunding option with each bond sale; thus, giving the current administration the ability to monitor interest rates and refund bonds when appropriate to help maintain a lower overall tax rate. The district's bond ratings are as follows:

- Standard & Poor's: A, Stable Outlook; and
- Fitch Ratings: AA-, Stable Outlook.

In July 2013, the district implemented an enterprise resources planning (ERP) system known as Total Education Administrative Management Solution. ERP systems integrate core business processing functions that allow the sharing of information across the organization in real time. The modules that make up ERP systems share data from various applications and promote efficiency and greater productivity than standalone legacy systems. The district's financial system modules include human resources, financial management, student management, and integrated modules for state reporting, security maintenance, electronic document management, and other applications.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- DeSoto ISD recognized an opportunity to enhance the district's budget process, applied to participate in the Alliance for Excellence in School Budgeting, and was accepted as a participant for fiscal year 2016.
- DeSoto ISD has a mandatory direct deposit policy that results in a more efficient and cost-effective method to remit payroll funds to employees.

FINDINGS

- DeSoto ISD's cash handling practices risk staff safety and present an opportunity for theft.
- DeSoto ISD lacks an effective asset management process to manage and safeguard fixed and controllable assets.
- DeSoto ISD lacks a workers' compensation loss prevention plan to ensure staff safety, reduce the district's financial risk, and ensure staff reintegration into the work environment after an injury or illness.
- DeSoto ISD does not involve school principals in key aspects of the budget development process and does not authorize them to make budget transfers within the same function without the approval of the Financial Services Department.
- DeSoto ISD lacks effective internal controls of the vendor and payroll master files.
- DeSoto ISD lacks a process to regularly review and update its accounting and purchasing policies and procedures.
- DeSoto ISD lacks an effective and efficient payroll system.
- DeSoto ISD has established a program that advances short-term loans to staff, but the program lacks an efficient method to recover the funds, and it is not certain that the program complies with the law.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 32: Develop minimum timeframes for making bank deposits and require district security to accompany all staff making bank deposits.**
- **Recommendation 33: Develop a comprehensive fixed assets management system to identify, record, inventory, track, and dispose of fixed assets.**
- **Recommendation 34: Develop a workers' compensation prevention plan to include a process to review the workers' compensation loss reports to identify unusual workers' compensation loss patterns, design targeted safety training, and establish a return-to-work program.**
- **Recommendation 35: Amend the district's budget development process and practices to include school principals in the beginning of the process and authorize them to control their budgets.**

- **Recommendation 36: Implement procedures and controls to ensure that only the Purchasing Department staff have access to add or make changes to the vendor master file and only Human Resources Department staff have access to add or make changes to the payroll master file.**
- **Recommendation 37: Develop a process to ensure that the district regularly updates and changes its accounting and purchasing policies and procedures to align with the district's existing financial management system.**
- **Recommendation 38: Eliminate the use of manual time cards, hold staff accountable for approving time cards as required by the district's schedule, and ensure the district meets its payroll and other financial obligations through an efficient payroll process.**
- **Recommendation 39: Consider eliminating the once-a-year interest-free loan program to staff.**

DETAILED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

EXCELLENCE IN BUDGETING INITIATIVE

DeSoto ISD recognized an opportunity to enhance the district's budget process, applied to participate in the Alliance for Excellence in School Budgeting, and was accepted as a participant for fiscal year 2016. The group of 20 to 30 school districts nationwide collaborates as a cohort to implement best practices in school district budgeting developed by the Government Finance Officer's Association (GFOA). The GFOA is a national organization based in Chicago that is committed to improving the financial practices of governmental organizations. The GFOA has developed a series of best practices that outlines steps to develop a school district's budget that aligns resources with student achievement goals.

The group uses materials developed by GFOA and will work together during fiscal year 2016 with the goal of each school district having a new budgeting process in place for fiscal year 2017. GFOA makes small grants to participants to support particular portions of the work. For example, GFOA pays for travel expenses to meetings in Chicago and provides a voucher for free access to GFOA's new eLearning technology and modules germane to school budgeting. The GFOA requires that the district's finance director and the academic officer participate in the group, at the time of the onsite review DeSoto ISD had designated the director of financial services and the academic officer to participate.

Taking the initiative to participate in the Alliance group affords DeSoto ISD the opportunity to enhance the district's budget practices and continue to foster transparency to its stakeholders.

DIRECT DEPOSIT

DeSoto ISD has a mandatory direct deposit policy that results in a more efficient and cost-effective method to remit payroll funds to employees. The district's direct deposit policy results in 100 percent of the DeSoto ISD employees receiving payroll directly deposited to their bank account or loaded onto a pay card. This policy saves time; eliminates trips to the bank; eliminates lost, stolen, and fraudulent checks; and ensures that employees receive payments when absent from the district.

The district issues reloadable pay cards to employees who do not have a bank account. Pay cards offer the convenience of a debit card and more security than carrying cash. The pay card requires no credit check and is accepted everywhere Visa debit cards are accepted. The pay card offers the following methods for employees to access their pay:

- point of sale purchases, including cash back where available;
- request a check from the bank card vendor;
- purchase a US Postal Service money order; and
- electronic transfer to a bank account.

In addition, the pay card offers the following benefits to employees:

- no paycheck cashing fees;
- no lost checks;
- no overdraft fees;
- no need to carry large sums of money;
- free access to pay for 24 hours every day;
- free multilingual customer service for 24 hours every day of the year;
- free access to monitor transactions online and text alerts

- free access to savings accounts; and
- cash back rewards.

Implementing mandatory direct deposit contributes to an efficient and effective payroll process for DeSoto ISD and ensures that employees receive timely payments.

DETAILED FINDINGS

CASH SECURITY (REC. 32)

DeSoto ISD's cash handling practices risk staff safety and present an opportunity for theft. The district allows its staff, unaccompanied by district or other security officers, to transport cash to the bank. The district has not established a secure cash pickup location at a campus or the central office. Moreover, DeSoto ISD's cash handling procedures do not include a specific timeframe for bank deposits to occur once staff collects funds.

Each campus collects cash in the form of proceeds from student fundraising events, vending machine sales, and cafeteria receipts. Campus personnel, such as school club advisors, bookkeepers, principal's secretaries, and cafeteria managers secure daily cash receipts in a safe until they are ready to transport funds from the campus to the bank for deposit. Designated staff at each campus travels in their personal vehicle to the bank at non-specific times to deposit funds, without the use of district security guards.

DeSoto ISD's *General Financial Procedures Manual*, Student and Campus Activity Fund Accounting section, describes the district's cash handling and reporting procedures. The manual outlines the procedures as follows:

- Count and verify the cash received while in the presence of the person presenting the cash.
- At least two people should be assigned the handling of activity funds: one for collecting/receipting; the other for preparing and making deposits.
- Prepare and sign a pre-numbered Official Cash Receipt for any cash and/or checks received, IMMEDIATELY.
- The original of the Official Cash Receipt should be given to the person presenting the cash and/or check. The copy of the Official Cash Receipt should remain in the Cash Receipt book and kept in a safe location.
- Cash is to be kept in a locked, secure place, until custody is transferred to carrier or deposited.
- Cash received is not to be used for making change or cashing checks for anyone or any purpose.
- Prepare a bank account deposit.
- Deliver the funds to the designated bank.
- Forward a copy of the completed deposit slip and supporting information to the finance office.

Figure 6–5 shows a summary of campus and student activity fund receipts at DeSoto ISD campuses and departments during fiscal years 2014 to February 2015. Athletics receives the majority of the campus and student activity fund receipts. **Figure 6–6** shows a summary of cafeteria-related receipts during the same period. DeSoto High School receives the majority of the cafeteria-related receipts.

FIGURE 6–5
DESOTO ISD CAMPUS AND STUDENT ACTIVITY FUND RECEIPTS
FISCAL YEAR 2014 TO FEBRUARY 2015

CAMPUS OR PROGRAM	2014	2015 (1)
DeSoto High School	$15,896	$248,848
Athletics	353,361	189,324
McCowan Middle School	3,500	177,832
Woodridge Elementary School	641	35,894
Northside Elementary School	21	29,954
Ruby Young Elementary School	38	29,747
DeSoto Freshman Campus	664	29,253
Cockrell Hill Elementary School	335	22,282
Amber Terrace Elementary School	0	22,084
West Middle School	558	18,612
The Meadows Elementary School	844	18,254
Moates Elementary School	404	17,973
Early College—Freshmen	0	16,680
East Middle School	1,162	11,858
High School Culinary Club Catering Receipts	3,764	300
Total	**$381,188**	**$868,895**

NOTE: (1) Receipts until February 2015.
SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Financial System, February 2015.

The review team conducted interviews with school bookkeepers to determine the extent to which they were following the procedures. The review team determined staff uses and maintains proper cash receipts documentation such as cash collection, receipt, and deposit forms. Bookkeepers also said that usually two individuals observer cash handling, although there have been exceptions. Moreover, cash is

FIGURE 6-6
DESOTO ISD CAFETERIA-RELATED RECEIPTS
FISCAL YEAR 2014 TO FEBRUARY 2015

CAMPUS OR PROGRAM	2014	2015 (1)
DeSoto High School	$200,352	$144,581
College and Career Academies	134,194	105,410
West Middle School	148,230	104,748
McCowan Middle School	165,380	80,764
DeSoto Freshman Campus	134,856	79,496
East Middle School	133,865	76,905
Ruby Young Elementary School	78,008	46,198
Cockrell Hill Elementary School	70,448	42,853
Moates Elementary School	42,732	36,087
Woodridge Elementary School	164,078	34,123
Northside Elementary School	48,490	31,017
The Meadows Elementary School	48,221	30,251
Amber Terrace Elementary School	60,062	25,797
Child Nutrition Department Catering Receipts	0	14,585
Total	**$1,428,916**	**$852,815**

NOTE: (1) Receipts until February 2015.
SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Financial System, February 2015.

typically kept locked in a secure place until custody is transferred or the staff deposits the money. However, the district's procedures do not stipulate a timeframe for deposits. Several years ago, a City of DeSoto police officer accompanied the DeSoto ISD staff to transport funds to the bank. However, the district discontinued this practice due to budgetary constraints. Currently, the district transports cash to the bank in a variety of ways. Some bookkeepers take student and campus activity fund receipts to the bank themselves in their private vehicles. In some instances campus staff place funds in a control bag with the deposit preparer's name, name of school, deposit date, bank account number, and declared amount written on the bag's label. The bag is stored in a locked drop box at the school.

The district has inconsistent practices as to how the deposits are completed. For example, two Child Nutrition Department staff make separate rounds to each school daily to collect the drop bags and transport them to the bank. These deposits typically consist of cafeteria receipts, but could also include student activity and campus funds if the bookkeeper or principal's secretary decides to use the drop box rather than take the money to the bank themselves. The accounting assistant in the district's central office receives deposits from some of the elementary schools. Others make their own deposits. Athletics also brings the accounting assistant gate fees from athletic events usually on a weekly basis during the season when athletic events occur. The accounting assistant and the administrative assistant take the deposit to the bank in their personal vehicle.

Allowing district staff to deposit cash at the bank unaccompanied by security represents an internal control weakness and presents a personal risk to these staff. Although cash handling procedures exist, they do not address securing deposits when transferring them to the bank. The procedures also do not address the timeframe for holding funds before the deposit occurs. For example, in April 2014, the district experienced theft of $12,730 in receipts raised by the cheerleading and majorette clubs at DeSoto High School. The receipts consisted of $5,880 in money orders and $6,850 in cash. According to the police report, on April 17, 2014, two coaches placed money bags in a desk drawer before leaving the district for the weekend. The following Monday morning, April 21, 2014, the coaches could not locate the money bags. The coaches told the police that only administrators and janitors have access to the office where the desks were located. There were no signs of forced entry. However, surveillance camera footage showed students exiting the gym where the burglarized office is located. Interviews with the students were inconclusive. The district filed a claim with its insurance company and received a recovery of $11,580. Although the district recovered 91.0 percent of the loss, DeSoto ISD has not addressed the lack of controls regarding safeguarding cash that contributed to this theft.

Effective cash handling procedures outline the frequency of cash deposits and the method of transportation. Auburn University publishes an internal control guide for cash collections. The guide directs Auburn University departments on how to safeguard cash. In the guide, the section "Recommended Controls—Depositing Cash," states the following provisions:

- Deposits must be made in a timely manner, with as little cash as possible being kept in departmental offices after business hours.
- Departments receiving cash every day should make daily deposits.
- When cash is deposited or when large sums of cash are on hand, departments are encouraged to ask for a police escort.

The cash handling procedures of Temple ISD, one of DeSoto ISD's peers, states: "All money coming into the school should be deposited daily." The Riverside Unified School District, in Riverside, California, and the Minneapolis Special District #1 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, both use an armored car service to transport cash deposits to the bank.

DeSoto ISD should develop minimum timeframes for making bank deposits and require district security to accompany all staff making bank deposits. The district should outline these changes in DeSoto ISD's financial policies and procedures.

The CFO should require the director of financial services to revise the district's cash handling procedures to include a provision to stipulate minimum frequencies for bank deposits and designate who should make the deposits. The director of financial services should effectively communicate these revisions to appropriate district staff. The director of financial services should update all training materials and communicate this information to new staff during new employee orientation.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources since it assumes that the district could use its own security staff to accompany district staff to make deposits to the bank.

ASSET MANAGEMENT (REC. 33)

DeSoto ISD lacks an effective asset management process to manage and safeguard fixed and controllable assets.

The district defines controllable assets as assets that cost less than $5,000 that districts must safeguard from theft and misuse such as cell phones and other technology and communication equipment. Fixed assets are items with a cost of $5,000 or more and a useful life greater than one year. Moreover, the district lacks a process to tag, track, and take inventory of fixed and controllable assets such as computer, communications equipment, and cafeteria equipment. The district does not barcode or tag fixed assets as the district receives them or identify the asset's location or custodian, but instead, the district's practice is to send the fixed assets directly to the campus. In addition, DeSoto ISD has not conducted a physical fixed asset inventory since 2004.

Nearly one-third of the DeSoto ISD's assets consist of technology equipment, such as computers. Yet, the district does not have a formal process to capture and manage technology equipment inventory. The district only maintains an accurate inventory of all technology equipment that connects to the network and is in the district's active network directory.

Figure 6–7 shows the district's approximately $160 million in fixed assets as of June 30, 2014. Of this total, approximately $4.0 million, or 3.0 percent, consisted of furniture and equipment.

Figure 6–8 shows the top 10 categories DeSoto ISD lists within the fixed-asset classification of furniture and equipment. These categories include computer, security, communications, cafeteria, band equipment, and vehicles. As of June 30, 2014, these 10 categories made up 77.0 percent of the furniture and equipment classification based on original costs and 83.0 percent based on book value, which is the amount of original costs remaining after deducting accumulated depreciation. In addition, the cost of the top 10 furniture and equipment categories has depreciated by 57.0 percent as of June 30, 2014.

FIGURE 6–7
DESOTO ISD SUMMARY OF FIXED ASSETS
FISCAL YEAR 2014

FIXED ASSETS	BALANCE 7/1/2013	ADDITIONS	RETIREMENTS	BALANCE 6/30/2014
Land	$7,512,720	$0	$0	$7,512,720
Building and Improvements (B&I)	211,032,212	441,193	28,203	211,445,202
Furniture and Equipment (F&E)	12,344,035	412,186	2,718,705	10,037,516
Accumulated Depreciation (B&I)	(57,764,183)	(4,904,210)	(28,303)	(62,640,090)
Accumulated Depreciation (F&E)	(7,847,637)	(854,831)	(2,719,505)	(5,982,963)
Net Capital Assets	**$165,277,147**	**($4,905,662)**	**$(900)**	**$160,372,385**

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Audited Financial Statement, June 2014.

FIGURE 6–8
DESOTO ISD DETAIL OF FIXED ASSETS
AS OF JUNE 30, 2014

CATEGORIES	ASSETS	ORIGINAL COST	ACCUMULATED DEPRECIATION	BOOK VALUE	PERCENTAGE DEPRECIATION
Computer Network Equipment	110	$3,062,885	$1,584,723	$1,478,162	52%
General Security Equipment	84	1,635,323	869,723	765,600	53%
Miscellaneous Furniture and Fixtures	17	507,345	210,054	297,290	41%
Trucks	25	427,615	347,417	80,198	81%
Computers	46	417,140	389,288	27,852	93%
Vans	21	377,501	279,016	98,485	74%
Band/Music Equipment	26	357,650	143,873	213,777	40%
Telephone System	16	326,398	231,630	94,768	71%
General Lunchroom Equipment	17	325,008	216,975	108,034	67%
Radio/TV Studio Equipment	3	306,685	106,928	199,757	35%
Total, Top 10 Furniture and Equipment	**365**	**$7,743,549**	**$4,379,626**	**$3,363,923**	**57%**
Total, Furniture and Equipment	**535**	**$10,037,516**	**$5,982,963**	**$4,054,554**	**60%**
Percentage of Total	**68%**	**77%**	**73%**	**83%**	

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Detailed Fixed Asset Listing, June 2014.

DeSoto ISD's director of purchasing also serves as the district's fixed assets coordinator responsible for identifying and recording fixed assets. When the district purchases fixed assets, the district codes the cost to account 6600-Capital Outlay-Land, Buildings in the district's financial management system. The director of purchasing reviews this account to identify items meeting the fixed assets criteria. Account 6600 consists of the following object codes:

- 6610—Land Purchase and Improvement;
- 6620—Building Purchase, Construction, or Improvements;
- 6630—Furniture and Equipment;
- 6640—Fixed Assets, District-Defined;
- 6650—Fixed Assets Under Capital Leases; and
- 6660—Library Books and Media.

Once the director of purchasing identifies a purchase as a fixed asset, the director records the information on a spreadsheet showing the asset identification number, category, category description, asset description, cost, acquisition date, and other pertinent information. The primary purpose of the spreadsheet is to provide a detailed listing of the costs and accumulated depreciation of assets for the required annual audited financial statements and not to establish management and control of fixed assets.

Campuses and departments retire property that is no longer needed using the district's Property Transfer/Disposal form. The district disposes of or stores retired items depending on the type of item and the determination of future needs. The district requires a properly executed Property Transfer/Disposal form to include the signatures of all parties involved in the transaction, including the sending and receiving to budget managers (if transferred) and plant services staff doing the actual moving.

The district forwards all completed Property Transfer/Disposal forms to the Purchasing Department for processing and for subsequent submittal to plant services. Plant services staff does not have to assist with disposal of smaller items; however, the process requires the Purchasing Department to receive the Transfer/Disposal form to remove the item(s) from the campus or department's assigned assets. When campuses or departments dispose of computers, servers, or any IT equipment possibly containing personal information (student grades, health records, student information, staff records, etc.), the district requires the Technology Department to approve the Property Transfer/Disposal form before the campus or department submits the form to the Purchasing Department. The Technology Department signature verifies that the department removed or wiped clean the computer

hard drives of any sensitive information before the district disposes of these items.

Before implementing its existing financial system, the district maintained fixed assets in the fixed assets module of its legacy financial system, Ed-Pro. Although the district's existing financial system has a fixed assets module, the district did not fully complete the implementation of this module. The district began implementing this module by uploading fixed asset information from the previous system to the current financial system. However, district staff said the implementation was incomplete because the existing financial system requires more information than the former system. Therefore, the district decided not to use the fixed asset module because staff felt it was too cumbersome, complicated, and time consuming to configure and input the district's approximately 3,400 assets. Instead, DeSoto ISD maintains its fixed assets in an Excel spreadsheet.

The vendor for the district's existing financial management system stated that the fixed asset module does not have more requirements than any other automated fixed asset programs but requires forethought and planning to maximize the features. The fixed assets module requires the district to assign each asset to a classification, category, and subcategory.

The lack of an effective fixed asset management system limits the district's ability to capture asset information at the procurement stage and track the cost, useful life, location, movement, custodian, and disposition of each asset. The district risks assets being lost, stolen, or retired without accountability. This risk also extends to controllable assets. The lack of an effective fixed assets system and inventory could result in insufficient support from the Technology Department because they do not know how much equipment to plan for support. In addition, the lack of a process to barcode fixed assets upon receipt makes it difficult to track and monitor technology and other equipment throughout the district.

Without an accurate physical inventory, there is no baseline for keeping an accurate accounting of fixed assets. Moreover, the absence of periodic inventories is inconsistent with the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) *Financial Accountability System Resource Guide* (FASRG), Section 1.2.4.8, which states the following:

> Certain capital assets, such as furniture and equipment, should be inventoried on a periodic basis. Annual inventories taken usually at the end of the school term before the staff members leave are recommended. Discrepancies between the capital asset/inventory list and what is on hand should be settled. Missing items should be listed and written off in accordance with established policy.

Finally, by not implementing the fixed assets module the district fails to fully leverage its investment in the financial system. The district also misses opportunity to use the system's capabilities to support a comprehensive, automated fixed assets management solution.

Figure 6–9 shows the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts fixed asset best practices to assist local governments with setting up an effective and efficient fixed assets management system. These best practices represent a comprehensive solution for fixed assets management systems and include suggested steps to develop and maintain an effective system.

According to the financial system vendor representative, other districts have implemented the fixed assets module with great success. The districts that have implemented the system use its barcoding capability to input the asset into the system upon purchase to facilitate physical inventory. The districts that have already implemented the system include Tyler ISD, El Paso ISD, Duncan ISD, Arlington ISD and Killeen ISD. In addition, Killeen ISD sponsors a user group through which other district users share ideas and best practices and offer solutions and software improvement suggestions. As of March 2015, other districts are in the process of implementing the system including Galena Park ISD, Goose Creek ISD, Lubbock ISD and Donna ISD.

DeSoto ISD should develop a comprehensive fixed assets management system to identify, record, inventory, track, and dispose of fixed assets. The district should also implement the fixed assets module in the existing financial system with the software vendor providing technical assistance. DeSoto ISD should contact some of the districts that have successfully implemented the fixed asset module to obtain information and advice. The district should also consider becoming a part of a user group to learn more about the experiences of other districts that use the program and to adapt lessons learned by other districts to its own environment.

The director of purchasing should organize a fixed assets committee to develop a plan of implementation based on fixed asset best practices. The director of purchasing should establish the committee consisting of the CFO, director of financial services, director of technology services, and other stakeholders throughout the district. The fixed assets

FIGURE 6–9
FIXED ASSET BEST PRACTICES
MAY 1999

Preliminary Steps	Identify individuals in the district who will have key fixed asset responsibilities and establish the nature of such responsibilities.
	Devise policies and procedures governing capitalization thresholds, inventory, accounting, employee accountability, transfers, disposals, surplus and obsolescence, and asset sale and disposition.
	Determine district fixed asset information needs and constraints.
	Determine the hardware and software necessary to effectively manage the system.
Creating the Fixed Asset Management System	Adopt a proposal setting up the fixed asset system including adoption of formal policies and procedures.
	Create positions and job descriptions for those with fixed-asset responsibilities.
	Determine the design of the fixed asset inventory database and develop standard forms to match the format of computerized records.
	Provide training as necessary.
	Identify specific assets below the capitalization threshold that should be tracked for information purposes and safeguarding.
	Budget the amount necessary to operate the fixed assets management system adequately.
Implementing the Fixed Asset Management System	Inform all departments of the requirements, policies, and procedures of the fixed assets system.
	Ensure that assets to be tracked on the system have been identified and tagged.
	Enter information into the fixed assets database.
	Assign appropriate values to the assets in the database.
	Establish location codes and custodial responsibility for fixed assets.
Maintaining the Fixed Asset Management System	Enter all inventory information into the automated fixed-asset system as fixed assets are received.
	Assign tag numbers, location codes, and responsibility to assets as they are received.
	Monitor the movement of all fixed assets using appropriate forms approved by designated district personnel.
	Conduct periodic inventories and determine the condition of all assets.
	Generate appropriate reports noting any change in status of assets including changes in condition, location, and deletions.
	Reconcile the physical inventory to the accounting records, account for discrepancies, and adjust inventory records.
	Use information from the system to support insurance coverage, budget requests, and asset replacements and upgrades.

SOURCE: Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, "Getting a Fix on Fixed Assets," *City and County Financial Management,* May 1999, Vol. 15, Issue 2.

committee should oversee the development of procedures to include the following:

- definitions and examples of controllable assets the district wishes to track;
- methods for identifying controllable and fixed assets, such as bar coding, tagging to all existing items and future purchases;
- staff responsibilities and accountability for assets;
- inventory procedures including who, when, where, and how to perform the annual inventory;
- frequency of physical inventories, such as annual or semiannual, including procedures for transferring assets from one location to another;

- procedures to follow when assets cannot be located, including responsibilities for making reports to police and the district's insurance carrier, as appropriate;
- procedures to follow when the district disposes of assets that are no longer useful or needed, including procedures for making deletions from inventory records; and
- procedures to follow when assets are donated to the district.

The committee should also revisit the implementation of the fixed assets module and solicit the technical support and advice of financial system vendor consultants as needed.

This fiscal impact assumes that the district would incur a cost associated with using the financial system consultants for the implementation of the fixed assets module. However, the cost cannot be determined until the district defines the scope of the implementation effort.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION (REC. 34)

DeSoto ISD lacks a workers' compensation loss prevention plan to ensure staff safety, reduce the district's financial risk, and ensure staff reintegration into the work environment after an injury or illness.

The district participates in a modified self-funded workers' compensation program administered by a risk management company based in San Marcos, Texas. The company is the district's third-party administrator (TPA) responsible for administering and processing the district's workers' compensation claims. The district's benefits clerk, with the direction and supervision of the director of financial services, works with TPA to administer the district's workers' compensation program. In accordance with its self-insured workers' compensation program, the district pays workers' compensation costs as they occur. Self-insurance provides an opportunity to lower costs and to customize a workers' compensation program that fits the district's needs. Instead of paying premiums to an insurance company, the district accumulates funds in an internal service fund until the district needs to pay the claims. The district uses internal service funds to account for financial resources used to provide goods and services such as workers' compensation insurance.

The district's specific stop loss is $450,000 per claim in accordance with the program. Stop loss provisions in self-funded insurance policies ensure that catastrophic claims or numerous claims do not deplete the financial reserves of the plan. If total claims exceed the aggregate limit, the stop-loss insurance carrier would reimburse the district for the excess. As part of a pool of organizations that participate in the self-funded workers' compensation program, the district pays its share of administration costs. In addition, each year, an actuary estimates the district's accrued liability in accordance with the program for incurred but not reported claims. These are claims for which not all costs have occurred. Therefore, an estimate is made of future liability.

Figure 6–10 shows the revenues, expenses, and the financial position of the workers' compensation self-insurance fund for fiscal year 2014. During fiscal year 2014, the district accumulated $427,098 in revenues and paid $261,779 in workers' compensation claims and administrative expenses. The total assets in the internal service fund were $336,443 and the estimated claims liability was $77,982. The fund balance as of June 30, 2014 was $258,461.

DeSoto ISD has not implemented an effective return-to-work program that has resulted in a high number of employee days lost before returning to work.

Figure 6–11 shows the average length of time it took for Desoto ISD injured employees to return to work after workers' compensation leave. Between fiscal year 2013 and April 2015, 32 Desoto ISD employees lost time due to their injuries. On average, these employees lost 74 days of work while on workers' compensation leave.

The TPA provides the district with workers' compensation loss reports monthly summarizing the district's workers' compensation claims. The TPA posts the monthly reports to the district's secure website by the tenth day of the month and the annual report by the thirtieth day after the year ends. The reports list each claim filed during the period and includes information such as claim number, date of injury, closed or open status, claim type, and claim costs. The report also provides specific information about the injury including the department, injury type, cause of injury, and body part. The director of financial services receives the workers' compensation loss reports from the benefits clerk but does not use the information to identify workers' compensation loss patterns, target safety training, or manage the workers' compensation function. At the time of the onsite review, it was not clear to the review team if the Financial Services Department designated staff to take any action because of these reports.

FIGURE 6–10
DESOTO ISD WORKERS' COMPENSATION INTERNAL SERVICE FUND
FISCAL YEAR 2014

ASSETS	TOTAL
Cash and Cash Equivalents	$336,443
Liabilities	
Accounts Payable	77,982
Net Position	
Unrestricted Net Position	258,461
Operating Revenues	
Local and Intermediate Sources	$427,098
Operating Expenses	
Other Operating Costs	261,779
Operating Income	165,319
Net Position July 1, 2013	93,142
Net Position June 30, 2014	**$258,461**

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Audited Financial Statement, Fiscal Year 2014.

FIGURE 6–11
DESOTO ISD WORKERS' COMPENSATION LOST TIME
FISCAL YEARS 2013 TO 2015

FISCAL YEAR	INJURED EMPLOYEES	DAYS LOST	AVERAGE DAYS LOST PER EMPLOYEE
2013	15	1,025	68
2014	11	935	85
2015 (1)	6	393	66
Total	**32**	**2,353**	**74**

NOTE: (1) Injured employees as of April 1, 2015.
SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Workers' Compensation Loss Time Report, fiscal years 2013, 2014, to April 2015.

Figure 6–12 shows DeSoto ISD's workers' compensation claims experience compared to two of DeSoto ISD's peers for fiscal years 2012 to 2014. Between fiscal years 2012 to 2014, DeSoto ISD averaged 97 claims per year at an average total incurred cost of $267,859. The district's individual claims decreased 17.0 percent from 105 during fiscal year 2012 to 87 during fiscal year 2014. During the same period, the district's incurred costs increased 96.0 percent from $147,374 during fiscal year 2012 to $288,179 during fiscal year 2014. The average cost per claim changed from $1,404 during fiscal year 2012 to $3,312 during fiscal year 2014. This trend indicates that while the number of claims fell during the three-year period, the cost of such claims increased.

When compared to the peer districts, DeSoto ISD had an average of 97 claims per year compared to 52 and 96 for Temple ISD and Sharyland ISD, respectively. DeSoto ISD averaged .093 claims per employee compared to 0.41 and .086 for Temple ISD and Sharyland ISD, respectively. Although DeSoto ISD had more claims per year on average than the peers, the cost of the district's claims were less. DeSoto ISD's average cost per claim was $2,761 compared to $3,653 for Temple ISD and $3,859 for Sharyland ISD.

The district pays the TPA to provide the safety training needed as it relates to loss prevention. The TPA provides semi-annual safety/wellness newsletters to all district employees. In addition, the TPA provides shoes, boots, and other personal protective equipment such as chemical masks, dust masks, cutting gloves, burn mitts, and safety goggles to auxiliary departments. The TPA also provides safety videos and topics on its website. **Figure 6–13** shows safety training sessions held for DeSoto ISD staff by TPA from August 2012 to February 2015.

The review team compared the workers' compensation claims to the training schedule to determine whether the district provides training in the areas of need based on the types of injuries that occur.

Figure 6–14 shows the analysis between the district's injuries and safety training. This analysis demonstrates the disconnect between the areas where injuries occur and the training the district provides. From fiscal year 2013 to January 2015, 152 out of 221 injury claims from Desoto ISD staff occurred by professional employees. The cost of these injuries was $561,434, 73.0 percent of the total costs of $764,824. However, the district only provided one safety training workshop for professional employees.

The district provided most of the training sessions to maintenance, custodial, and food service staff. These staff groups accounted for only 31.0 percent of claims and 27.0 percent of costs. Of the 18 safety training sessions the district provided, 94.0 percent occurred specifically for maintenance, custodial, and child nutrition, with only 6.0 percent including professional employees.

Effective districts establish workers' compensation loss prevention plans to ensure the district minimizes its financial and human capital loss and risk. These plans include effective preventive training that considers the district's incidents and a plan to ensure employees return to work quickly and safely. Effective organizations include the use of workers' compensation loss reports in their plan to address concerns

FIGURE 6–12
DESOTO ISD WORKERS' COMPENSATION CLAIMS COMPARED TO PEERS (1)
FISCAL YEARS 2012 TO 2014

DESOTO ISD						
YEAR	CLAIMS	INCURRED COSTS	TOTAL EMPLOYEES	CLAIMS PER EMPLOYEE	COSTS PER EMPLOYEE	AVERAGE COSTS PER CLAIM
2014	87	$288,179	1,003	0.087	$287.32	$3,312
2013	99	$368,023	1,055	0.094	$348.84	$3,717
2012	105	$147,374	1,082	0.097	$136.21	$1,404
Total	**291**	**$803,576**	**3,140**			
Average	**97**	**$267,859**	**1,047**	**0.093**	**$255.92**	**$2,761**
TEMPLE ISD						
YEAR	CLAIMS	INCURRED COSTS	TOTAL EMPLOYEES	CLAIMS PER EMPLOYEE	COSTS PER EMPLOYEE	AVERAGE COSTS PER CLAIM
2014	48	$125,355	1,231	0.039	$101.83	$2,612
2013	59	$254,558	1,280	0.046	$198.87	$4,315
2012	48	$186,231	1,279	0.038	$145.61	$3,880
Total	**155**	**$566,144**	**3,790**			
Average	**52**	**$188,715**	**1,263**	**0.041**	**$149.38**	**$3,653**
SHARYLAND ISD						
YEAR	CLAIMS	INCURRED COSTS	TOTAL EMPLOYEES	CLAIMS PER EMPLOYEE	COSTS PER EMPLOYEE	AVERAGE COSTS PER CLAIM
2014	114	$455,397	1,149	0.099	$396.34	$3,995
2013	86	$318,392	1,125	0.076	$283.02	$3,702
2012	88	$328,978	1,076	0.082	$305.74	$3,738
Total	**288**	**$1,102,767**	**3,350**			
Average	**96**	**$367,589**	**1,117**	**0.086**	**$329.18**	**$3,829**

Note: (1) Data available for only two peer districts.
Sources: DeSoto ISD and peer districts, Workers' Compensation Loss Reports, fiscal years 2012 to 2014.

that could reduce claims and lower costs. **Figure 6–15** shows the "10 Ways to Find Dollars in Workers' Comp Loss Run Reports" as published in the February 2010 issue of *Workforce Magazine*. This best practice seeks to help employers get the most out of loss reports.

Furthermore, districts recognize that incidents do occur and employees could be absent from work for a period which could result in a loss of time and resources for daily operations. To minimize staff absences, districts establish a return-to-work program as part of their plan. Return-to-work programs help injured or ill employees regain or maintain their job, keep such employees engaged in the work environment, reduce disability-related absences and costs, and increase company productivity when such employees return to work. When districts establish such a program, it affirms the district's commitment to its employees' safety, welfare, and ability to return to work in the event of an incident or illness.

An effective return-to-work program contains the following elements:

- Purpose—Describes the purpose of the program, for example to manage the return to work of injured employees to minimize time lost.
- Definitions—Provides important definitions of terms such as alternate duty, preferred provider, and transitional work assignment.
- Policy—Outlines the organization's policies with respect to ill or injured employees out on workers' compensation leave.

FIGURE 6–13
DESOTO ISD SAFETY TRAINING SESSIONS
AUGUST 2012 TO FEBRUARY 2015

DATE	TOPIC	STAFF
August 2012	Like a Rock—A Back You Can Depend On	Maintenance/Custodial
October 2012	Positive Thinking for Less Stress and Safety	Maintenance/Custodial
October 2012	First Aid	Maintenance/Custodial
October 2012	First Aid	Child Nutrition
February 2013	Chemical Safety and Bloodborne Pathogens	Maintenance/Custodial
March 2013	It's a Jungle—Kitchen Safety	Child Nutrition
August 2013	Safety Makes Sense—ABCs of Safety	Maintenance/Custodial
September 2013	Stress Management	Child Nutrition
September 2013	Substance Abuse	Maintenance/Custodial
September 2013	Hazardous Communications	Maintenance/Custodial
September 2013	Stress Management	Maintenance/Custodial
January 2014	Safety Makes Sense—ABCs of Safety	Child Nutrition
June 2014	Stress and Safety	Child Nutrition
June 2014	Chemical Safety	Maintenance/Custodial
August 2014	Awareness and Teamwork	Maintenance/Custodial
August 2014	Stress and Safety	Maintenance/Custodial
September 2014	Awareness and Teamwork	Child Nutrition
February 2015	Strains, Sprains, and Backs	All Staff, including Professional Staff

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Edwards Risk Management, Inc., February 2015.

FIGURE 6–14
DESOTO ISD INJURIES COMPARED TO SAFETY TRAINING
FISCAL YEAR 2013 TO FEBRUARY 2015

STAFF	CLAIMS	COST	PERCENTAGE OF CLAIMS	PERCENTAGE OF COST	TRAINING SESSIONS	PERCENTAGE OF TRAINING SESSIONS
Professional	152	$561,434	69%	73%	1	6%
Child Nutrition	56	$124,760	25%	16%	6	33%
Maintenance/Custodial	13	$78,630	6%	11%	11	61%
Total	**221**	**$764,824**			**18**	

SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board, School Review Team, March 2015.

- Benefits—Establishes the benefits of the return-to-work program, for example promoting faster, effective healing and increasing employee morale and productivity.
- Responsibilities—Establishes responsibilities for district management, injured employees and their supervisors, and other district employees as appropriate.
- Process—Outlines the return-to-work process including options available to the returning employee based on district policy.

The Hanover Insurance Group, Inc. (HIG), based in Worcester, Massachusetts, is one of the oldest insurance and risk management companies in the United States. HIG has published a sample return-to-work model that outlines the requirements of an effective return-to-work program as follows:

FIGURE 6–15
TEN WAYS TO FIND DOLLARS IN WORKERS' COMP LOSS RUN REPORTS
FEBRUARY 2010

INFORMATION	USE
1. Length of time between a loss and when it is reported	Assess whether claims are being addressed promptly in accordance with district standards—for example within 24 hours.
2. New-hire injuries	Determine whether injuries occurring during the first 90 days of employment are due to inadequate training, particularly on use of machinery or equipment.
3. Percentage of lost-time claims	Analyze the percentage of lost-time claims to total claims to determine if a high percentage (greater than 25.0 percent) could indicate an ineffective return-to-work process.
4. Percentage of litigated claims	Determine whether a high percentage of claims litigated is an indication that employees lack trust in the district and/or the workers' compensation process.
5. Repetitious claims	Determine if the cause of repetitious claims is due to unsafe acts or unsafe conditions and respond accordingly.
6. Small indemnity amounts paid	Determine if the return-to-work process is working effectively. For example, loss wages of less than $1,000 could be a sign that the process needs review.
7. Percentage of open claims	Assess whether claims are being closed as quickly as possible to avoid/reduce costs.
8. Total costs incurred	Understand how specific claims are driving up costs and respond as appropriate.
9. Policy year totals	Compare year-to-year totals to identify unusual patterns and trends.
10. General comparisons	Analyze the frequency and severity of injuries by department, location, injury type, and body part to look for unusual patterns and trends.

SOURCE: *Workforce Magazine*, "10 Ways to Find Dollars in Workers' Comp Loss Run Reports," February 2010.

- immediate reporting of injuries and illnesses;
- use of a medical provider network, whose members have agreed to practice return-to-work principles;
- jobs bank of potential transitional duty tasks;
- coordinated team approach involving the injured employee, medical provider, and the insurance third-party administrator; and
- training of employees in the elements of the return-to-work program.

The model provides a program handbook, return-to-work checklist, sample letters to physicians and employees, and other tools necessary to develop an effective return-to-work program. This program is available at www.hanover.com.

DeSoto ISD should develop a workers' compensation prevention plan to include a process to review the workers' compensation loss reports to identify unusual workers' compensation loss patterns, design targeted safety training, and establish a return-to-work program. The director of financial services, in cooperation with appropriate human resources staff and the district's workers' compensation TPA, should use the loss report information to target safety-training initiatives and improve the workers' compensation program.

The benefits clerk should maintain statistical information and prepare reports for the CFO and director of financial services highlighting relevant or unusual patterns and trends. The director of financial services should instruct the benefits clerk to develop a list of data points from workers' compensation loss reports. The benefits clerk should use the data points to populate a spreadsheet that tracks historical loss information. The benefits clerk should consider capturing the following information on these reports:

- older claims that remain open with no activity;
- claims with little activity that still show reserves;
- claims that have been settled but are still showing active reserves;
- claims of which the district is unaware;
- claims that are medical only;
- claims with large dollar reserves and little paid;
- recurring claims by specific individuals; and
- frequency of claims by location.

The district should also develop a return-to-work policy, and implement a return-to-work program to facilitate the return of employees who are out on workers' compensation leave.

The district's TPA offers return-to-work programs as one of its services in accordance with the modified self-funded workers' compensation program. The CFO and the chief human resources officer should meet with the TPA's account representative to develop a return-to-work program for the district. Before the meeting, the CFO should instruct the benefits clerk to obtain model programs such as the Hanover Insurance Group's sample program available on the company's website. The CFO should use the samples as a possible framework for the district's return-to-work program.

The fiscal impact for this recommendation assumes that DeSoto ISD could reduce workers' compensation claims costs by 10.0 percent, resulting in a $28,818 gain per year based on fiscal year 2014 incurred costs of $288,179 ($288,179 x 10.0 percent =$28,818).

BUDGET DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT (REC. 35)

DeSoto ISD does not involve school principals in key aspects of the budget development process and does not authorize them to make budget transfers within the same function without the approval of the Financial Services Department. Although the district gives principals and campus staff discretion regarding how they use their budget allocations at the campus, the district does not include these staff in the budget development and allocation process.

The district's budget process begins in January with the superintendent's approval of the budget calendar. The superintendent, CFO, and the superintendent's cabinet conduct budget planning workshops to review prior year budgets, review and update salary schedules, and review staffing needs. The CFO works with campus administrators to develop student enrollment projections. The CFO also sends each department and campus a budget target letter, which establishes the budget submission deadline, provides information about the budget process and training, and provides the organization's budget allocation for the year.

Desoto ISD builds the budget allocations from the previous year's budget amounts that the district calculates on a per-student basis. Although campuses are not involved in determining their budget allocation amount, they can complete an "Above Allocation Budget Request Form" to request additional funding. The form must include the additional amount requested, description of the items to use the funds for, and a justification for the increase.

Figure 6–16 shows the fiscal year 2014 budget calendar and demonstrates the absence of principal involvement in budget allocation development.

The district also does not authorize principals to make budget transfers without the Financial Services Department's involvement. Instead, campus staff enters budget transfers into the district's financial system after the accounting director in the Financial Services Department approves them. This process is inefficient because it results in an unnecessary layer of approval, which could delay the campus from getting the resources needed for educational services. Moreover, TEA encourages this practice in FASRG, Section 5.3.4, Budget Amendments, which states:

> Campus budget managers may be granted the authority (at the discretion of the school district board) to move budgeted funds from one expenditure object to another within a function. For example, a principal may transfer budgeted funds from Supplies and Materials (Object 6300) to Other Operating Costs (Object 6400) within Instruction (Function 11) without formal board approval.

Limiting principal involvement in the budget development process and not allowing them to make their own budget transfers diminishes their status as campus managers. This lack of participation and authority encourages feelings of isolation rather than involvement and inclusion.

The review team surveyed campus staff to determine if the district allocates campus funds fairly amongst the campuses. Nearly 22.0 percent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. Another 36.0 percent agreed or strongly agreed, while 42.0 percent had no opinion.

Districts that authorize principals to have a more active role in the budget development process provide a more inclusive environment, which suggests that district administrators value the input of the leaders closest to the actions. FASRG, Section 2.4.5, states the following:

> The main advantage of site-based budgeting is that it allows school personnel to make budgetary decisions for their own campuses. Thus, those who best understand student needs at the campus level plan how funds are used to meet them. This decentralization of budgetary authority may also be a means of increasing school accountability. Another potential advantage of site-

FIGURE 6–16
DESOTO ISD BUDGET CALENDAR
FISCAL YEAR 2014

TARGET DATE	ACTIVITY/PROCESS	RESPONSIBILITY
January	Budget Planning Calendar Approved	Superintendent
January	Budget and Long-range Planning Workshop	CFO, Cabinet, Superintendent
February	Budget Process Approved	Superintendent and Cabinet
February	Projected enrollments developed	CFO and Campus Administrators
March	Budget Process outlined to principals and staff	Superintendent and CFO
March	Midyear 2011–12 Report to Board with 2012–13 Update	Superintendent and CFO
March	Target Letters and Budget Worksheets sent to Campuses and Departments	CFO and Director of Financial Services
March	Beginning of Campus Budget Preparations	Principals and Staff
March	Beginning of special programs and support services budget preparation	Special Programs and support services budget preparation
April	Completed campus budgets due to finance office	Principals
April	Completed special programs and support services budgets due to finance office	Special Programs and support departments
April	First projected revenue estimates	Superintendent and CFO
April	Review personnel staffing and proposed salary schedule	Superintendent and Cabinet
May	Mailing of notice of appraised value	Chief Appraiser
May	Review of building maintenance, renovation, and	Superintendent and Cabinet
May	Initiate superintendent's review of preliminary district budget	Superintendent
May	Complete superintendent's review of preliminary district budget, personnel requirements, facility requirements	Superintendent and Cabinet
May	Complete first draft of district budget	CFO and Director of Financial Services
June	Review first draft of district budget	Superintendent
June	Budget Workshop	Superintendent and School Board
June	Set date for public meeting on budget and proposed tax rate Board Budget Committee Workshop	CFO and Board Committee
June	Complete near -final budget draft	Superintendent and CFO
June	Final Budget Workshop	CFO, School Board, Superintendent
June	Publish Notice for Public Meeting to Discuss Budget and Tax Rate	CFO, School Board President
June	Adopt Budget	School Board
July	Certified tax rolls to district calculation of rollback rate	Chief Appraiser
August	Adopt Budget and Tax Rate	School Board

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Fiscal Year 2015 Budget Book, Page 46.

based budgeting is increasing the level of participation of both campus staff and parents in budget development. Many site-based budgeting systems create committees composed of campus staff, parents, and other community members to determine campus budgetary allocations. These committees give parents and other community members a voice in school budgeting from its on, rather than merely when the budget is presented for public review by the district board.

DeSoto ISD should amend the district's budget development process and practices to include school principals in the beginning of the process and authorize them to control their budgets. During budget development, the district should give principals a larger role in determining budget allocations

for their campuses. After budget adoption, the district should allow principals to make their own budget transfers rather than relying on the Financial Services Department to approve the transfers.

The CFO and the director of financial services should leverage the knowledge and information gained from the Alliance for Excellence in School Budgeting to develop a means of expanding the role of principals in the budget development process. The superintendent and CFO should meet with principals to determine how to enhance their role in budget development. The CFO should instruct the director of financial services to conduct a training session with principals to demonstrate how to make budget transfers without the Financial Services Department authorization.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

INTERNAL CONTROLS (REC. 36)

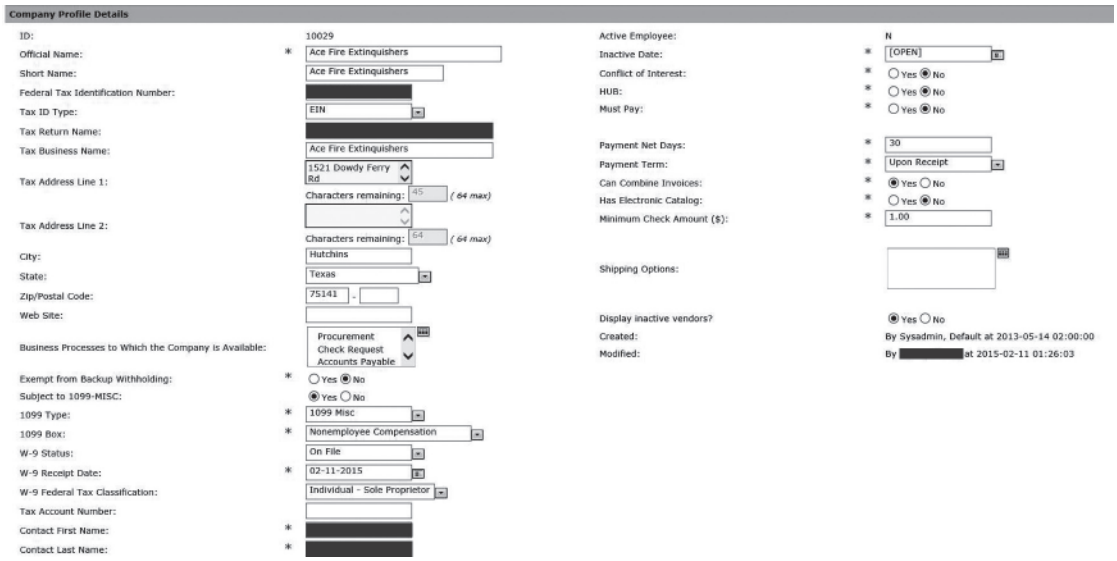
DeSoto ISD lacks effective internal controls of the vendor and payroll master files.

The district maintains a vendor database that includes information about each vendor, such as the vendor identification number, name, address, and federal identification number. The purchasing specialist, in the Purchasing Department, is the sole district staff responsible for establishing new vendors in the district's financial system. Accounts payable staff has access in the financial system that allows them to change existing vendor information, and payroll staff has access that allows them to change staff pay rates.

Although accounts payable clerks cannot add vendors to the master file, they can change and update vendor records. The vendor number is the only field accounts payable clerks cannot change on the vendor master file. During onsite review interviews, the review team learned that since the accounts payable staff processes 1099s at the end of the year, accounts payable staff needs access to change vendor information. However, the district did not provide a reasonable justification for accounts payable clerks' access to change vendor information. **Figure 6–17** shows the district's financial system screen that would allow accounts payable clerks to change vendor information.

The district's financial system has a notification feature that could send an email to a designated individual or individuals alerting them of changes made to the vendor master file. However, at the time of the onsite review, this feature was not operating as it had not been set up to send change notifications to anyone in the district. This system feature serves as a control to prevent unauthorized changes to the vendor master file. The purchasing specialist is the district's custodian of the vendor master file who would receive a notification when a change occurs. However, during the onsite interviews,

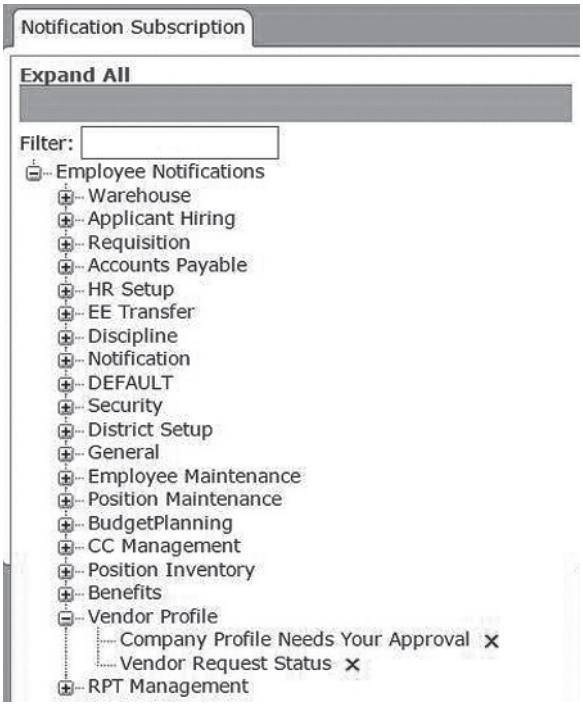
FIGURE 6–17
DESOTO ISD VENDOR MAINTENANCE SCREEN
FEBRUARY 2015



SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Financial System, February 2015.

the review team learned that the purchasing specialist was not aware that the feature existed. **Figure 6–18** shows the vendor change notification screen in the financial system where the district could input the change notification.

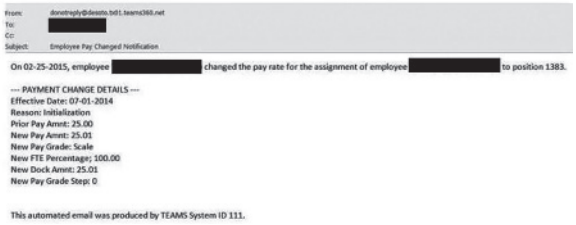
FIGURE 6–18
DESOTO ISD VENDOR CHANGE NOTIFICATION
FEBRUARY 2015



SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Financial System, February 2015.

According to district practice, only the district's human resources staff has authority to add an staff to the payroll master file. The review team learned during interviews that only certain employees in the Human Resources Department had access to modify pay rate and salary information. However, the review team observed during a test of payroll database access, that the payroll clerk, who does not officially have access to modify pay rate and salary information, was able to modify her own pay rate. In theory, the system would send a notification report to the Human Resources Department notifying staff when a pay rate change occurs. However, the review team observed that the payroll clerk received a notification concerning her pay rate change, but the Human Resources Department did not receive a notification about this change. **Figure 6–19** shows the system-generated email sent to the payroll specialist notifying her of the pay rate change.

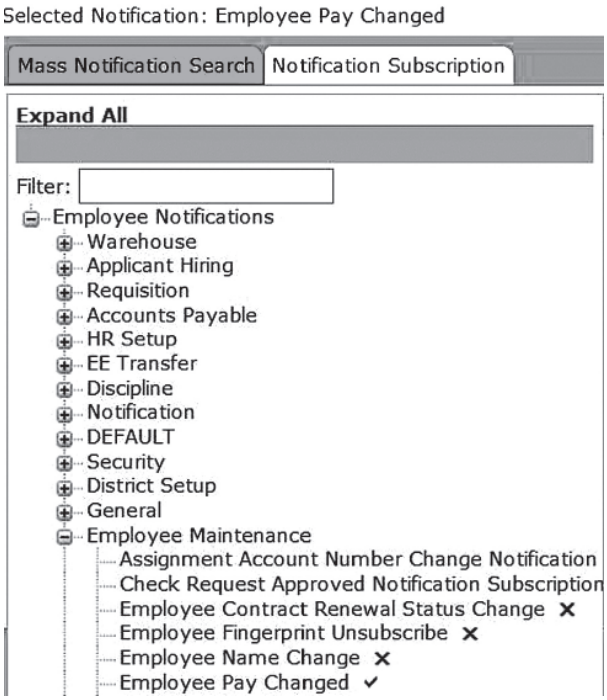
FIGURE 6–19
DESOTO ISD FINANCIAL SYSTEM NOTIFICATION OF PAY RATE CHANGE
FEBRUARY 2015



SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Financial System, February 2015.

The human resources staff designated to receive the email notification did not receive it and was not aware of such an email. Therefore, even if this individual would have received this email, they could have overlooked it and not responded. While onsite, Human Resources Department staff made the necessary system change to ensure receipt of future payroll master file changes. **Figure 6–20** shows the financial system screen showing the Human Resources Department staff request to receive the notifications.

FIGURE 6-20
DESOTO ISD FINANCIAL SYSTEM PAY CHANGE NOTIFICATION SELECTION
FEBRUARY 2015



SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Financial System, February 2015.

Unauthorized access to change vendor and payroll information could lead to unauthorized payments, which could result in financial loss and a damaged reputation for good stewardship of taxpayer dollars. The ability to modify an existing vendor record is almost akin to adding a new one. This is particularly true if an employee with ill intent were able to identify an inactive vendor to which unauthorized payments could occur. For example, an employee could enter a vendor with a name similar to an existing vendor and submit an invoice for payment. Additionally, an employee could change the address of an existing vendor and divert payments to a district staff maintained post office box. In addition, without efficient controls and limited access to the payroll master file, the district risks staff changing their or other staff pay without the district's knowledge or approval.

Effective internal controls of the vendor and payroll databases ensure that only a few staff have the ability to make changes to these databases. Effective internal controls also include procedures to validate new vendors and require periodic review of the vendor and payroll databases to ensure that all information is accurate and current. In an audit of the City of San Jose's master vendor file, auditors made the following recommendations, which could serve as best practices for both vendor and payroll master database management:

- Develop a policy specifying the criteria for authorizing access to the master vendor file and limit access to the master vendor file to the fewest number of employees necessary.
- Establish a policy addressing incompatible duties with regard to master vendor file maintenance and implement master vendor file access controls to effectuate that policy.
- Design and implement a report detailing all the additions, deletions, and changes made to the master vendor file, including the identity of the person making the changes.
- Require a senior level manager to periodically review and approve all additions, deletions, and changes to the master vendor file.

DeSoto ISD should implement procedures and controls to ensure that only the Purchasing Department staff have access to add or make changes to the vendor master file and only Human Resources Department staff have access to add or make changes to the payroll master file. The district should also review access districtwide to ensure that only designated staff receives access to critical databases. DeSoto ISD should also review the settings in the district's financial system to ensure that key staff receives notifications of changes to these databases.

The CFO should instruct the director of financial services to coordinate with the director of purchasing, chief human resources officer, and the director of technology services to review and assess payroll and vendor master file access controls. The director of financial services, director of purchasing, chief human resources officer, and the director of technology services should review access controls and make recommendations for changes to the CFO. The CFO should review the recommendations and instruct the director of financial services to update the procedures manual reflecting the changes and to communicate the changes to accounts payable, purchasing, human resources, and payroll personnel.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

FINANCIAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES (REC. 37)

DeSoto ISD lacks a process to regularly review and update its accounting and purchasing policies and procedures.

Historically, DeSoto ISD has had accounting and purchasing policies and procedures, but since 2013, the department has not updated them to align with the district's current financial management system.

The district publishes its *General Financial Procedures Manual* on its website on the Business and Finance Services Department page. The manual, last updated September 26, 2012, has 134 pages and contains four major sections and an appendix. The major sections include Purchasing Procedures Guide, Financial Procedures Guide, Student and Campus Activity Fund Accounting, and Travel and Travel Reimbursement. The Purchasing Procedures Guide section has 12 subsections, the Financial Procedures Guide section has five subsections, the Student and Campus Activity Fund Accounting section has 10 subsections, and the Travel and Travel Reimbursement section has one subsection. The appendix contains sample forms such as purchase requisition and budget transfer forms. **Figure 6–21** shows an overview of the topics in each subsection, which contains a variety of finance-related subjects.

In July 2013, the district converted from its legacy system to its current financial system. The current financial system is an enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution for the K-12 environment. ERP systems integrate business processes and

FIGURE 6–21
DESOTO ISD GENERAL FINANCIAL PROCEDURES MANUAL OVERVIEW
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

PURCHASING PROCEDURES GUIDE	FINANCIAL PROCEDURES GUIDE
1. Purchasing Authority	1. Account Code Determination Revisited
2. Quotations, Bids, Awards	2. School Debt Card Procedures
3. Historically Underutilized Business and Local Firms	3. Budget Transfer and Amendment Instructions
4. Purchase Requisition Processing	4. Consultative Service Contract
5. Emergency Purchase Orders	5. Property Transfer and Disposal
6. Purchase Orders	**STUDENT AND CAMPUS ACTIVITY FUND ACCOUNTING**
7. Fund Requisition	1. General Information
8. Vendor Information	2. Activity Fund Types
9. Standardization of Material	3. Cash Handling and Reporting
10. Account Code Determination	4. Petty Cash Box Fund
11. Legal Considerations	5. Purchasing Policies and Procedures
12. State, Local Sales, and Federal Excise Taxes	6. Fund Raising Activities
TRAVEL AND TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT	7. Disbursement of Funds
1. Travel Guidelines	8. Internal Control
	9. PTAs
	10. Board Policies and Procedures

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, General Financial Procedures Manual, September 2012.

activities using common databases that track transactions in real-time. ERPs differ from legacy systems in this regard because legacy systems update records through overnight batch processing. Therefore, policies, procedures, tasks, and activities associated with legacy systems often vary widely from those associated with ERP systems.

Failing to update financial policies and procedures after the implementation of the new financial system has resulted in certain provisions of the district's financial procedures manual becoming obsolete. Outdated policies and procedures are essentially useless to those who rely on them for financial management, business administration, and transaction processing. Policies and procedures are critical components of a strong system of internal controls when they are current. However, when they are outdated, district employees may not know or understand how to process a given transaction or what the district's policy is in a given situation. This could lead to noncompliance with district policy, violations of state and federal law, and confusion and inconsistency in processing transactions.

Figure 6–22 shows outdated excerpts from the *General Financial Procedures Manual* that could result in misunderstanding, errors, and noncompliance with policy and statutory requirements.

Updated financial and procurement policies and procedures are key components of a strong system of internal control. The Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO) is a joint initiative of five private sector organizations in the auditing and accounting industry. COSO provides guidance and thought leadership to businesses in all sectors of the economy through the development of frameworks and guidance on enterprise risk management, internal control, and fraud deterrence. In a May 2013 publication entitled, "Internal Control-Integrated Framework," COSO states the following with respect to the role of policies and procedures in internal control:

> Control activities are the actions established through policies and procedures that help ensure that management's directives to mitigate risks to the achievement of objectives are carried out….the organization deploys control activities through policies that establish what is expected and procedures that put policies into action.

DeSoto ISD should develop a process to ensure that the district regularly updates and changes its accounting and purchasing policies and procedures to align with the district's existing financial management system. The director of financial services should review the *General Financial*

FIGURE 6–22
DESOTO ISD OBSOLETE GENERAL FINANCIAL PROVISIONS
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

OBSOLETE PROVISION	RATIONALE
When ordering items from the State Contract, enter State Contract in the space provided for Bid/Contract Number at the bottom of the requisition form and choose State from the Ed-Pro financial system drop-down menu.	Ed-Pro no longer exists
Printouts of all approved requisitions entered before 9 A.M. are reviewed daily in the purchasing office for accuracy of expenditure accounts, account balances, and vendor selection.	Requisitions no longer need to be printed for review. They are routed through the financial system's electronic workflow and reviewed online by the purchasing specialist.
After purchase orders are printed, the originator will receive the green and goldenrod copies.	Colored-paper copies of purchase orders are no longer provided. Users can review purchase orders online in the financial system.
Choose to enter a new requisition. For assistance, refer to Requisition Entry in the Ed-Pro tutorial in this manual or at www.edpi.com.	Ed-Pro no longer exists
Users may utilize regular or open purchase orders, using the usual Ed-Pro system data entry.	Ed-Pro no longer exists
Please include one of the following choices to identify the correct bid information (available on the Ed-Pro drop-down menu at point-of-purchase requisition entry).	Ed-Pro no longer exists
Please follow guideline in Appendix A – Requisition Maintenance for specific information on entering requisitions in the Ed-Pro system.	Ed-Pro no longer exists

SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, March 2015; DeSoto ISD, *General Financial Procedures Manual*, February 2015.

Procedures Manual for obsolete provisions. This review should, at a minimum, address the sections that reference the district's previous financial management system. The director of financial services should edit the manual and present it to the CFO for review and approval. The CFO should review and approve the manual and instruct the director of financial services to post it to the website and notify district staff of the manual updates. The CFO should instruct the director of financial services to draft a process to ensure that the Financial Services Department regularly updates the manual. This process should, at a minimum, include steps to annually review the manual.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

PAYROLL SYSTEM (REC. 38)

DeSoto ISD lacks an effective and efficient payroll system.

DeSoto ISD invested in a timekeeping system that the district has not fully configured or provided access for all employees to use. As a result, some employees continue to submit their time cards manually, which is inefficient and leads to slower payroll processing. The district uses the time and attendance module included with the district's financial management system. DeSoto ISD requires auxiliary and paraprofessional employees to clock in daily. The district's professional employees only enter their absences into the system. Auxiliary and paraprofessional employees have two options for entering their time: swipe their ID badges, through a time clock upon entry to their work location; or record a timestamp through the timekeeping module. However, some DeSoto ISD employees still manually record their time and attendance using paper time cards. In all cases, each employee's supervisor must approve their time card in the district's financial management system before the district processes payroll. **Figure 6–23** shows an example of a time clock, which appears in strategic locations throughout the district.

FIGURE 6–23
DESOTO ISD EMPLOYEE TIMECLOCK
FEBRUARY 2015

SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board, School Review Team, February 2015.

Figure 6–24 shows an example of the screen that employees use to enter their time stamps into the district's financial management system.

Figure 6–25 shows an example of the screen that employees use to enter their absences.

The timekeeping module is not available to crossing guards, tutors, and substitutes. These employees must complete a paper time card, which other district staff, such as a supervisor or secretary enters into the financial management system. **Figure 6–26** shows an example of a time card.

In addition to these groups, employees who work extra duty must prepare paper time cards to record their time if a duty code is not available to enter into the system. Extra duty is work performed that is beyond the scope of the employee's regular duties such as coaching, tutoring, credit recovery, and security. Employees receive supplemental pay for extra duty work. The district's financial management system has pre-defined codes that describe the extra duty. If there is no code in the system to adequately describe the extra duty, a paper time card must be prepared that describes the work, and staff must enter the information into the timekeeping system manually to process supplemental pay. From August 2014 to February 2015, there were 1,441 supplemental pay entries in the system totaling $801,787.

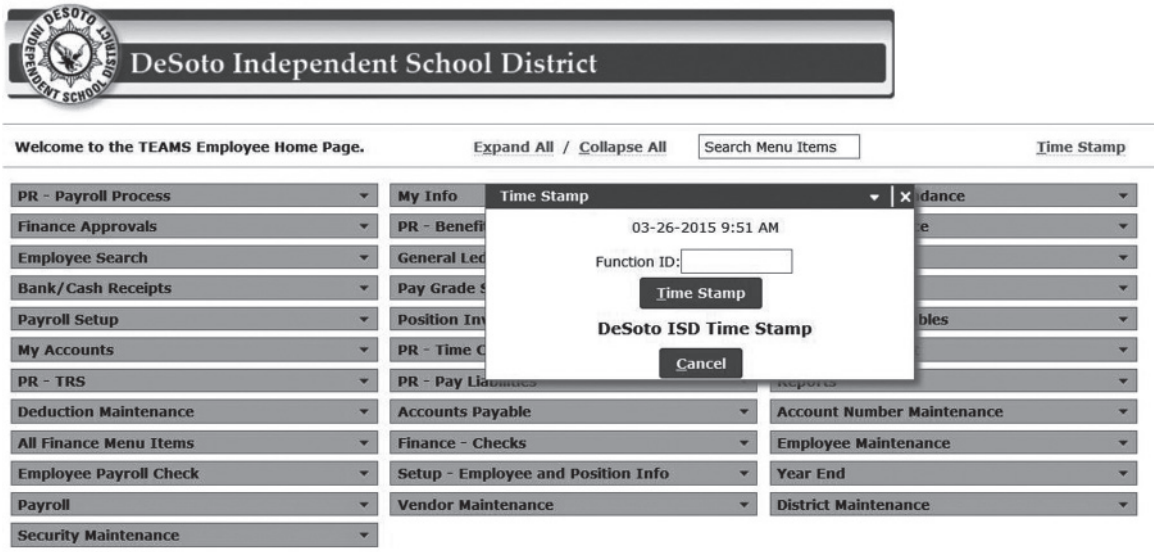
In addition to the district using a dual time and attendance tracking system, Desoto ISD does not enforce timely approval of time cards, and there is no accountability for missing payroll deadlines. Further, the district does not use available time tracking statistics to monitor late time card submissions and identify and address concerns with repeat offenders.

The district has three monthly and one biweekly payroll. The district pays salaried, paraprofessional, and substitute employees monthly and pays auxiliary employees biweekly. Salaried employees include professional employees such as principals and teachers while paraprofessional employees include clerks and administrative assistants. Auxiliary employees consist of bus drivers, food service, and maintenance staff, for example.

Typically, monthly time cards are due two days after the end of the pay period for the monthly payroll and four days for the biweekly payroll. Exceptions occur when the district adjusts pay and due dates to accommodate holidays. **Figures 6–27** and **6–28** show the district's monthly and biweekly pay periods, time card submission deadlines, and pay dates for fiscal year 2015.

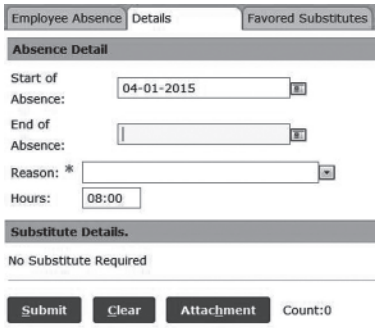
The payroll specialist sends an email to supervisors encouraging them to approve late time cards. If the time card

FIGURE 6–24
DESOTO ISD TIME STAMP ENTRY SCREEN
FEBRUARY 2015



SOURCE: DeSoto ISD Financial System, February 2015.

FIGURE 6–25
DESOTO ISD ABSENCE DETAILS ENTRY SCREEN
FEBRUARY 2015

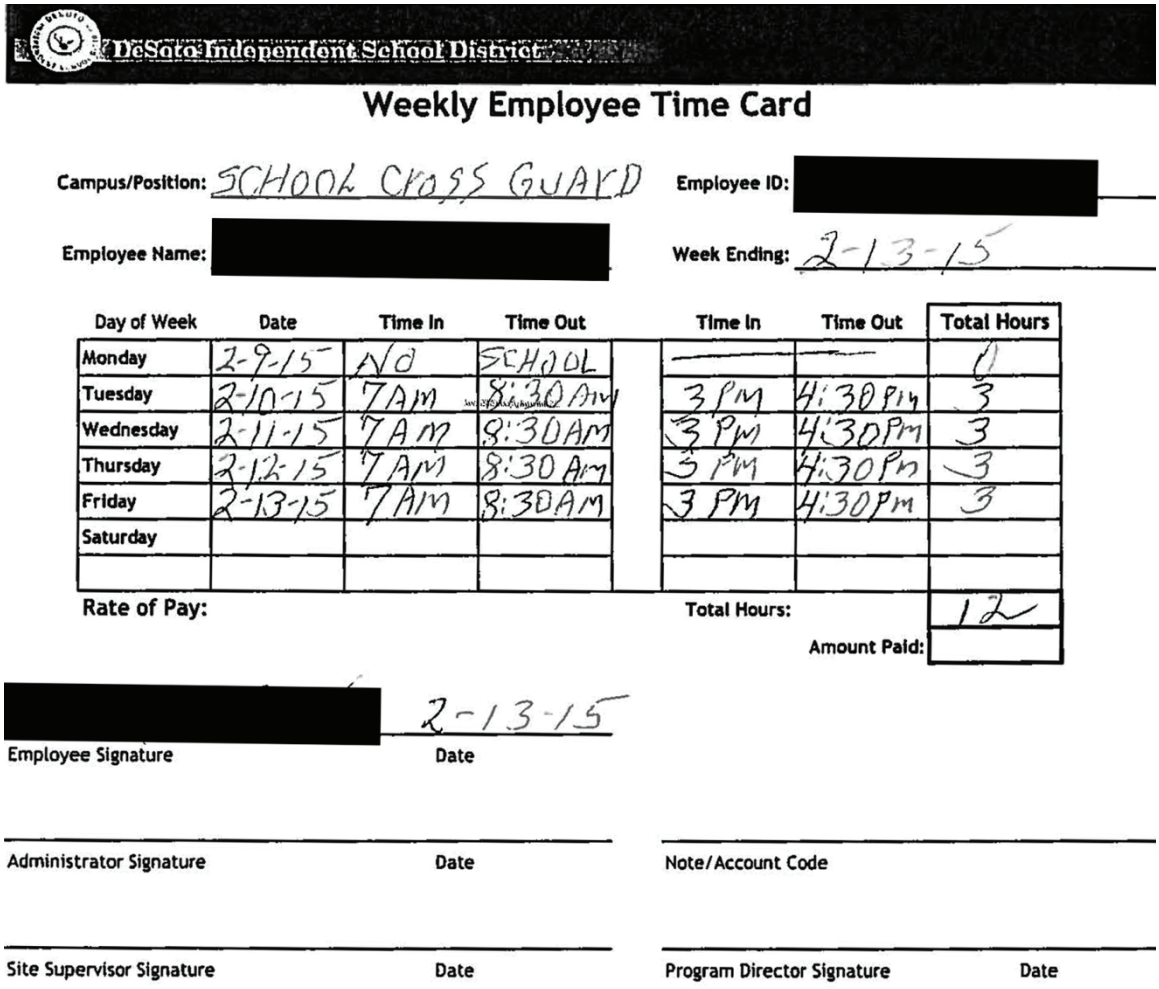


SOURCE: DeSoto ISD Financial System, February 2015.

remains unapproved, the payroll specialist notifies the director of financial services who sends a notification to the cabinet, principals, and secretaries asking them to follow up with the individuals to get the time cards approved. The review team examined more than 20 examples of the payroll specialist's email notifications of unapproved time cards that were slowing down the payroll process.

For each pay period, the financial system maintains a record of when supervisors approve time cards. The system generates statistics identifying timely and late approved time cards. **Figure 6–29** shows a summary of the analysis of the time card approval statistics from July 2013 to February 2015. The review team's analysis showed that the problem of unapproved time cards is persistent throughout the district.

FIGURE 6–26
DESOTO ISD CROSSING GUARD TIME CARD
FEBRUARY 2015



DeSoto Independent School District

Weekly Employee Time Card

Campus/Position: SCHOOL CROSS GUARD Employee ID: [redacted]

Employee Name: [redacted] Week Ending: 2-13-15

Day of Week	Date	Time In	Time Out	Time In	Time Out	Total Hours
Monday	2-9-15	NO	SCHOOL	—	—	0
Tuesday	2-10-15	7AM	8:30AM	3PM	4:30PM	3
Wednesday	2-11-15	7AM	8:30AM	3PM	4:30PM	3
Thursday	2-12-15	7AM	8:30AM	3PM	4:30PM	3
Friday	2-13-15	7AM	8:30AM	3PM	4:30PM	3
Saturday						

Rate of Pay: Total Hours: 12

Amount Paid:

[redacted] 2-13-15

Employee Signature Date

Administrator Signature Date Note/Account Code

Site Supervisor Signature Date Program Director Signature Date

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, School Bookkeeper, February 2015.

FIGURE 6–27
DESOTO ISD MONTHLY PAYROLL SCHEDULE
FISCAL YEAR 2015

PAY PERIOD BEGINNING DATE	PAY PERIOD ENDING DATE	TIME CARD APPROVAL DEADLINE	PAY DATE	PAY PERIOD BEGINNING DATE	PAY PERIOD ENDING DATE	TIME CARD APPROVAL DEADLINE	PAY DATE
08/03/2014	08/30/2014	09/2/2014	09/26/2014	02/01/2015	02/28/2015	030/2/2015	03/26/2015
08/31/2014	09/27/2014	09/29/2014	10/24/2014	03/01/2015	03/28/2015	03/30/2015	04/24/2015
09/28/2014	10/25/2014	10/27/2014	11/21/2014	03/29/2015	04/25/2015	04/27/2015	05/22/2015
10/26/2014	11/22/2014	11/24/2014	12/19/2014	04/26/2015	05/30/2015	06/01/2015	06/26/2015
11/23/2014	12/27/2014	01/05/2015	01/26/2015	05/31/2015	07/04/2015	07/06/2015	07/24/2015
12/28/2014	01/31/2015	02/02/2015	02/26/2015	07/05/2015	08/01/2015	08/03/2015	08/26/2015

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Monthly Payroll Schedule, February 2015.

FIGURE 6–28
DESOTO ISD BIWEEKLY PAYROLL SCHEDULE
FISCAL YEAR 2015

PAY PERIOD BEGINNING DATE	PAY PERIOD ENDING DATE	TIME CARD APPROVAL DEADLINE	PAY DATE	PAY PERIOD BEGINNING DATE	PAY PERIOD ENDING DATE	TIME CARD APPROVAL DEADLINE	PAY DATE
08/03/2014	08/16/2014	08/20/2014	08/29/2014	02/15/2015	02/28/2015	03/04/2015	03/14/2015
08/17/2014	08/30/2014	09/03/2014	09/12/2014	03/01/2015	03/14/2015	03/18/2015	03/27/2015
08/31/2014	09/13/2014	09/17/2014	09/26/2014	03/15/2015	03/28/2015	04/01/2015	04/10/2015
09/14/2014	09/27/2014	10/01/2014	10/10/2014	03/29/2015	04/11/2015	04/15/2015	04/24/2015
09/28/2014	10/11/2014	10/15/2014	10/24/2014	04/13/2015	04/25/2015	04/29/2015	05/08/2015
10/13/2014	10/25/2014	10/29/2014	11/07/2014	04/26/2015	05/09/2015	05/14/2015	05/22/2015
10/26/2014	11/08/2014	11/13/2014	11/21/2014	05/10/2015	05/23/2015	05/27/2015	06/05/2015
11/09/2014	11/22/2014	11/26/2014	12/05/2014	05/24/2015	06/06/2015	06/10/2015	06/19/2015
11/23/2014	12/06/2014	12/10/2014	12/19/2014	06/07/2015	06/20/2015	06/24/2015	07/02/2015
12/07/2014	12/20/2014	12/17/2014	01/02/2015	06/21/2015	07/04/2015	07/08/2015	07/17/2015
12/21/2014	01/03/2015	01/07/2015	01/16/2015	07/05/2015	07/18/2015	07/22/2015	07/31/2015
01/04/2015	01/17/2015	01/21/2015	01/30/2015	07/19/2015	08/01/2015	08/05/2015	08/14/2015
01/18/2015	01/31/2015	02/04/2015	02/14/2015	08/02/2015	08/15/2015	08/19/2015	08/28/2015
02/01/2015	02/14/2015	02/18/2015	02/27/2015				

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Biweekly Payroll Schedule, February 2015.

Since the adoption of the district's existing financial system, 20.0 percent of employees' time cards received late approval.

If a time card remains unapproved, the payroll clerks review it more closely. If there are any questionable absences or a day missing on the time card the payroll clerk does not approve the employee's time card for payroll, but all other time cards receive approval for payroll. The district pays the incomplete time cards the next pay period. When employees complain about not receiving payment for extra duty work, the payroll clerk refers them back to the campus to enter and approve the time card for payment.

Completing paper time cards and entering them into the timekeeping system is inefficient, time consuming, and subject to human error. It is also paper intensive and does not maximize the power and purpose of automated timekeeping. Retaining two methods of recording time defeats the purpose and intent of automated timekeeping and is unnecessary.

FIGURE 6–29
DESOTO ISD TIME CARD APPROVAL STATISTICS
JULY 2013 TO FEBRUARY 2015

CATEGORY	SUBMISSIONS	PERCENTAGE LATE	CATEGORY	SUBMISSIONS	PERCENTAGE LATE
Athletes For Change		100%	Communications		28%
Gear Up Grant		100%	Career and Technology		27%
Superintendent		80%	Athletics		27%
Early College High School		78%	Assessment and Accountability		24%
Facility Management/ Rental		72%	Northside Elementary School		24%
Curriculum and Instruction		70%	Finance		23%
Professional Development and Guidance		68%	The Meadows Elementary School		22%
Parent Engagement		62%	Chief Financial Officer		22%
Human Resources		61%	Ruby Young Elementary School		21%
Operations and Compliance		60%	McCowan Middle School		17%
Special Education		59%	Frank D. Moates Elementary School		17%
DeSoto High School		56%	West Middle School		16%
Instructional Supervisors		51%	Afterschool Centers on Education Program		16%
DeSoto Freshman Campus		51%	Plant Services		15%
Technology		51%	Amber Terrace Elementary School		13%

FIGURE 6–29 (CONTINUED)
DESOTO ISD TIME CARD APPROVAL STATISTICS
JULY 2013 TO FEBRUARY 2015

CATEGORY	SUBMISSIONS	PERCENTAGE LATE	CATEGORY	SUBMISSIONS	PERCENTAGE LATE
Federal Programs		44%	Cockrell Hill Elementary School		10%
WINGS Campus		43%	Purchasing		9%
Student Support Services		40%	Assistant Superintendents		5%
Disciplinary Alternative Education Program		36%	Child Nutrition		3%
East Middle School		34%	Summer School High School Camp		0%
Board of Trustees		34%	Energy Management		0%
Woodridge Elementary School		31%			
Total		**20%**			

NOTE: ☐=Time card submissions approved on time; ■=time card submissions approved late.
SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, March 2015; DeSoto ISD, Financial System, February 2015.

Further, failure to approve time cards on time slows the payroll process and results in bottlenecks and inefficiencies for payroll staff. Instead of starting the payroll process, payroll clerks must spend time contacting campuses and department staff to remind them to approve time cards. **Figure 6–30** shows 10 examples of email notifications sent during fiscal year 2015 to either the campus or the director of financial services regarding late time cards. At one time, the district had 1,322 time cards pending approval.

Producing payroll is a time-sensitive activity. The district not only must pay employees on time, but also deposit payroll taxes, render third-party payments, and file timely regulatory reports.

Timely approval of time cards is critical even for salaried employees. If the district does not ensure approval of an employee's absence, the employee's leave balance would not reflect the absence and could lead to inaccurate service records. As it relates to paraprofessionals, pending time cards could result in inaccurate compensatory leave balances.

Duncanville ISD uses the same financial management system as DeSoto ISD. However, Duncanville ISD eliminated the need for paper timesheets and has provided all employees access to the timekeeping system. Moreover, Duncanville ISD has established 357 duty codes whereas DeSoto ISD has only established 136. The additional codes enable Duncanville ISD to use the full capabilities of the financial system and avoid using paper timesheets.

The Oracle Corporation, an American multinational computer technology company, published "Payroll for the People: Five Best Practices for the Global Organization." In the commentary, the company offers five payroll best practices, two related to timely submission of timesheets. These practices are: Establish Discipline and Manage Expectations and Enforce Accountability. To establish discipline and manage expectations every organization has

FIGURE 6–30
DESOTO ISD LATE TIME CARD NOTIFICATIONS
AUGUST 2014 TO FEBRUARY 2015

DATE	E-MAIL MESSAGE FROM PAYROLL CLERK	UNAPPROVED TIME CARDS
02/03/2015	None—Only a list of pending time cards was sent to director of financial services	1,322
01/24/2015	I show the following timecards are still in pending status for your campus.	23
01/15/2015	None—Only a list of pending timecards was sent to director of financial services	77
12/05/2014	The following list is of timecards still in pending status.	445
11/12/2014	As of today, the Freshman Campus still has 132 pending timecards. The deadline for timecard approvals was October 27. When I run the weekly plug, any pending time cards will be considered unaccounted for hours and will be converted to an absence of Time Not Earned. Weekly Plugs will reduce Compensatory, Local, and then State Leave as available before docking the employee.	132
11/07/2014	As requested, here is a list of pending time cards.	316
10/20/2014	The following timecards are still pending. Once I run the weekly plug, each of these employees will be charged leave for unaccounted for (unapproved) hours.	454
10/20/2014	None—Only a list of pending time cards was sent to director of financial services.	43
10/17/2014	I emailed department managers on this week, but I still have a few "hanging" time cards that have not been reviewed, edited, and approved.	454
08/21/2014	I emailed department managers on Tuesday, but I still have a few "hanging" time cards that have not been reviewed, edited, and approved.	18

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Late Time Card Notification Emails, February 2015.

the same goal: an error-free, efficient, and effective payroll department. This process could include establishing strict deadlines for employee timesheet submission; ensuring that all stakeholders know what to expect from the payroll department, and managing expectations about how payroll works and the rules. Furthermore, to enforce accountability, organizations establish the payroll rules of engagement, ensure all stakeholders are appropriately accountable; ensure employees and managers know their responsibility; communicate the consequences of failing to be accountable for meeting payroll's requirements; and establish transparency, with all steps in the process visible to the payroll staff.

DeSoto ISD should eliminate the use of manual time cards, hold staff accountable for approving time cards as required by the district's schedule, and ensure the district meets its payroll and other financial obligations through an efficient payroll process. The director of financial services should identify the steps the district needs to take to make the automated timekeeping system available to all district employees and eliminate the need for manual time cards. The director of financial services should determine if the district should exempt some district employees from the automated timekeeping system based on the nature of their work, such as crossing guards. The director of financial services should review the extra duty codes and determine the need for expansion to accommodate the types of work performed to eliminate extra duty paper time cards.

The superintendent should instruct the CFO, director of financial services, chief human resources officer, and director of technology services to develop a plan for providing district employees with access to the timekeeping module. The CFO should instruct the director of financial services to gather data on extra duty codes that are not in the financial system that resulted in paper time cards. The committee should obtain input from principals, department heads, and other district stakeholders. The plan should include the employees affected, implementation timelines, roles and responsibilities, communication protocols, and training requirements. Once finalized the committee should submit the plan to the superintendent for approval. The district should implement the plan and notify employees to begin using the timekeeping system and the new extra duty codes.

The district should also reiterate to employees the importance of payroll processing deadlines and emphasize the district's expectations that supervisors approve time cards on a timely basis. The district should also use data from the financial system to identify employees who fail to adhere to the schedule and hold repeat violators accountable. The district should adopt a preventive instead of a reactive approach to timely approval of time cards and notify those employees

that the Financial Services Department would track the late approvers and hold them accountable. Finally, the district should clear all unapproved time cards currently in the system to ensure accurate employee leave balances and resulting payouts for the year.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

EMPLOYEE LOANS (REC. 39)

DeSoto ISD has established a program that advances short-term loans to staff, but the program lacks an efficient method to recover the funds, and it is not certain that the program complies with the law.

For the past six school years, DeSoto ISD has offered a voluntary program to its staff that enables them to receive funds that the staff pay back through payroll deductions during the following school year. Those who sign up receive a one-time check for $1,200, and the district requires the staff to repay the loan during the following 12 months through payroll deductions. For fiscal year 2015, forms were due by June 25, 2014, so that payroll deductions could begin. The 2014 authorization form contains the following language:

> The voluntary program will begin again on the start date of your new contract year. On or before December 1, 2014, participants will receive a check in the amount of $1,200 with a corresponding voluntary payroll deduction of $100 from each of the 12 monthly paychecks during your contract year.
>
> In the event you should resign after receiving the check, the balance due to the district on the advance will be subtracted from your final salary payment.

In November 2014, the district extended these loans to 497 staff, totaling $594,000. The district has had instances in which staff resigned from the district after receiving the loan. As of March 2015, staff who had resigned owed the district $3,900. The district was unable to recover the funds when the staff resigned because their final checks were insufficient to absorb the outstanding loan balances.

Advancing interest-free loans to staff could result in negative consequences for the district. First, it could lead to financial loss if the staff terminates and their final check is insufficient to recover the funds or if the district is unable to recover the funds. Second, extending loans to staff could result in the perception of inappropriate use of taxpayer dollars among the district's constituents. Third, extending and accounting for interest-free employee loans is not the district's core function. Finally, pursuant to the Texas Constitution, Article III, Section 52(a), the Legislature may not authorize a political corporation, including a school district, to grant public money to an individual unless the money is used to carry out a public purpose. The Attorney General of Texas Opinion GA-0076, 2003, states that funds expended will not constitute a gift of public funds prohibited by Article III, Section 52, if the district applies these qualifications, issued by the Texas Supreme Court, to determine if the expenditure accomplishes a public purpose: (1) ascertain if the expenditure's predominant purpose is to accomplish a public purpose, not to benefit private parties; (2) retain sufficient control of the expenditure to ensure that the public purpose is accomplished; and (3) ensure that the district receives a return benefit.

DeSoto ISD's mission statement is "to prepare each student academically and socially to be a problem solver and productive citizen for a twenty-first-century global society." As a fiduciary of taxpayer dollars, DeSoto ISD has a responsibility to remain true to its mission and to refrain from engaging in activities that divert from it. FASRG, Section 8.1.1, states the following with respect to public scrutiny of school districts:

> There is an inherent skepticism about management of public school resources. Administrators face the demand for providing greater levels of service at decreased expenditure levels. This demand for providing "more for less" requires district management to be creative and seek alternatives to traditional service delivery methods. Additionally, parents and patrons of school districts have become increasingly involved in the decision-making process. Participation in site-based decision-making initiatives enables them to communicate with the board at scheduled meetings and workshops. School administrators are challenged to incorporate often diverse community demands for accountability at all levels of the district's organization.

DeSoto ISD should consider eliminating the once-a-year interest-free loan program to staff. The district should also consider collecting outstanding loans from former staff who terminated employment before the district could recover the funds through payroll deduction. The district should consider the potential additional legal costs that could be incurred to collect the outstanding loans.

The superintendent should instruct the CFO to evaluate the program for consistency with the law. The superintendent should report to the board on the CFO's evaluation. If any shifts to the program are established, the district should timely communicate the program's changes to all employees.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

FISCAL IMPACT

Some of the recommendations provided in this report are based on state or federal laws, rules, or regulations, and should be promptly addressed. Other recommendations are based on comparisons to state or industry standards, or accepted best practices, and should be reviewed to determine the level of priority, appropriate timeline, and method of implementation.

RECOMMENDATION	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	TOTAL 5-YEAR (COSTS) OR SAVINGS	ONE-TIME (COSTS) OR SAVINGS
CHAPTER 6. FINANCIAL AND RISK MANAGEMENT							
32. Develop minimum timeframes for making bank deposits and require district security to accompany all staff making bank deposits.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
33. Develop a comprehensive fixed assets management system to identify, record, inventory, track, and dispose of fixed assets.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
34. Develop a workers' compensation prevention plan to include a process to review the workers' compensation loss reports to identify unusual workers' compensation loss patterns, design targeted safety training, and establish a return-to-work program.	$28,818	$28,818	$28,818	$28,818	$28,818	$144,090	$0
35. Amend the district's budget development process and practices to include school principals in the beginning of the process and authorize them to control their budgets.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
36. Implement procedures and controls to ensure that only the Purchasing Department staff have access to add or make changes to the vendor master file and only Human Resources Department staff have access to add or make changes to the payroll master file.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
37. Develop a process to ensure that the district regularly updates and changes its accounting and purchasing policies and procedures to align with the district's existing financial management system.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
38. Eliminate the use of manual time cards, hold staff accountable for approving time cards as required by the district's schedule, and ensure the district meets its payroll and other financial obligations through an efficient payroll process.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
39. Consider eliminating the once-a-year interest-free loan program to staff.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
TOTAL	**$28,818**	**$28,818**	**$28,818**	**$28,818**	**$28,818**	**$144,090**	**$0**

CHAPTER 7. PURCHASING

An independent school district's purchasing function is responsible for providing quality materials, supplies, and equipment in a timely, cost-effective manner. Purchasing includes identification and purchase of supplies, equipment, and services needed by the district, as well as the storage and distribution of goods.

School districts in Texas are required to follow federal and state laws and procedures applicable to purchasing. The purpose of competitive bidding requirements found in the Texas Education Code (TEC), Section 44.031, is to stimulate competition, prevent favoritism, and secure the best goods and services needed for district operations at the lowest possible price. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) developed a comprehensive purchasing module in the Financial Accountability System Resource Guide (FASRG), which is available as a resource for district purchasing.

DeSoto Independent School District's (ISD) Purchasing Department is part of the district's Business and Financial Services Department. The Purchasing Department's budget for fiscal year 2015 is $217,690, which is 11 percent of the Business and Finance Services Department's budget of more than $2 million. The Purchasing Department consists of the director of purchasing and a purchasing specialist. The director of purchasing reports to the chief financial officer (CFO). The director of purchasing has employed by the district since February 2008 and has been the director of purchasing since January 2013. In addition to purchasing responsibilities, the director of purchasing also serves as the district's fixed assets and textbooks coordinator. **Figure 7–1** shows the Purchasing Department's organization.

FIGURE 7–1
DESOTO ISD PURCHASING ORGANIZATION
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, February 2015; DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

The district has two warehouses. The director of plant services oversees the warehouse operations. The district only maintains janitorial and paper supplies at the warehouse facility located at 200 W. Parkerville Road. The district also houses Child Nutrition and Energy Management staff operations in this facility. The warehouse manager and one warehouse driver deliver paper and janitorial supplies to campuses and departments based on orders placed with the warehouse manager.

The Texas Education Code, Section 31.0211, entitles a school district to an annual allotment from the state's instructional materials fund for each student enrolled in the district. Districts request instructional materials and disbursements through the Educational Materials (EMAT) system, and the Instructional Materials Allotment (IMA) amount decreases based on the value of the request. **Figure 7–2** shows fiscal years 2014 and 2015 IMA allocations and expenditures for DeSoto ISD and peer districts. Peer districts are Texas school districts similar to DeSoto ISD that are used for comparison purposes. DeSoto ISD's IMA allocation is similar to those of its peers.

FIGURE 7–2
DESOTO ISD AND PEER DISTRICTS' INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS ALLOTMENTS
FISCAL YEARS 2014 TO 2015

DISTRICT	2014 ALLOCATION	2014 EXPENDITURES	2015 ALLOCATION	2015 EXPENDITURES
DeSoto	**$704,591**	**$95,152**	**$734,622**	**$1,486,084**
Temple	$701,141	$10,000	$680,098	$719,751
Cedar Hill	$654,850	$176,982	$615,256	$1,105,116
Sharyland	$824,516	$229,325	$816,516	$1,621,805

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Educational Materials System, February 2015.

The director of purchasing serves as the district's textbook coordinator and participates on the district's IMA committee. This committee is responsible for selecting the district's instructional materials and includes staff from the Curriculum Department and course specialists for math, English, reading, and social studies.

DeSoto ISD stores the textbooks in a warehouse located at 601–B East Beltline Road. The warehouse is approximately 3,000 square feet. The district uses approximately two-thirds of the space for storing instructional materials and the remainder for storing heating/ventilation/air conditioning materials and equipment.

During the summer, the district hires students to barcode textbooks at the warehouse. The district uses textbook management software that provides real-time information for books in stock. This information includes which campus, teacher, and student is responsible for the textbook. After the books are entered into the system and delivered to the campus, the campus textbook coordinator, who is responsible for the instructional materials on each campus, distributes the books to the students and scans receipt of the textbooks into the textbook management system. After the district assigns books to a student in the system, the system links each book to a student until the student returns the book. When the student's book is returned and updated in the management system, the system releases the student from liability for the book.

Each student is responsible for returning the textbooks at the end of the school year. The district assesses a fee to students that fail to return the textbooks and transfers the fee from the campus account to the textbook account to purchase more materials. The district plans to increase its purchases of consumable textbooks, typically workbooks that students do not have to return, to reduce the effort involved in managing textbook inventory at the end of the school year.

The Texas Procurement and Support Services Cooperative Purchasing Program enables volume purchasing power for local governments and assistance organizations. **Figure 7–3** shows the seven cooperative purchasing arrangements in which DeSoto ISD participates.

FIGURE 7–3
DESOTO ISD COOPERATIVE PURCHASING ARRANGEMENTS
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

ORGANIZATION	ARRANGEMENT
Regional Education Service Center XVIII (Region 18)	Performs cooperative purchasing services for its members by soliciting open catalog bids in three bid categories, which include: (1) school and office supplies, instructional materials, and furniture; (2) computer hardware, software, supplies, and accessories; and (3) physical education and athletic equipment and supplies.
Buyboard	Increases the purchasing power of government entities and simplifies their purchasing experience by using a customized electronic purchasing system.
Texas Department of Information Resources (DIR)	DIR is the state's technology agency. School districts that buy through DIR can purchase products and services at aggressive discounts without the need for a lengthy procurement process.
The Cooperative Purchasing Network (TCPN)	TCPN is associated with the Regional Education Service Center IV. TCPN leverages purchasing power by competitively soliciting proposals and awarding contracts for commonly purchased products and services such as facilities, furniture, office supplies and equipment, security systems, technology, and other goods and services.
The Interlocal Purchasing System (TIPS)	TIPS is a national purchasing cooperative that offers access to competitively procured purchasing contracts to its membership. TIPS is housed at and managed by the Regional Education Service Center VIII located in Pittsburg, Texas.
Texas Procurement and Support Services (TPASS)/Texas Multiple Award Schedules (TXMAS) and Texas term contracts	TPASS is a division of the Comptroller of Public Accounts that provides an assortment of contract development and contract management operations and customer service that is core to state of Texas purchasing, including administering the Historically Underutilized Business program, the Centralized Master Bidders List, and the TxSmartBuy online ordering system. In addition, TPASS Contract Development processes hundreds of solicitations and awards for the statewide Term, Managed, TXMAS, and open market contracts. The TPASS Contract Management Office manages those contracts.
Educational Purchasing Cooperative of North Texas (EPCNT)	EPCNT is a consortium of North Texas public school districts, charter schools, and Regional Education Service Centers located in Regions X and XI that cooperate to improve the purchasing power of members.

SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, February 2015; DeSoto ISD Purchasing Department, February 2015.

FINDINGS

- DeSoto ISD does not effectively implement and enforce purchasing practices to align with district policies and procedures and recommended TEA guidelines.
- DeSoto ISD lacks procedures to monitor the vendor database to maintain an accurate and updated vendor list to ensure staff use approved vendors when making purchases.
- DeSoto ISD does not maximize its financial system to monitor and track aggregate purchases to ensure compliance with state law.
- DeSoto ISD lacks a process to manage warehouse inventory.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 40: Evaluate district purchasing procedures and practices to identify the steps needed to enforce compliance with policies and guidelines.**
- **Recommendation 41: Establish a process for reviewing and deactivating dormant vendors and periodically purging the district's vendor database.**
- **Recommendation 42: Implement a process to begin tracking the district's aggregate purchases by extracting the data from the financial system.**
- **Recommendation 43: Establish practices and procedures to strengthen internal controls of janitorial and paper supply inventories in the district's warehouse.**

DETAILED FINDINGS

PURCHASING PROCESS (REC. 40)

DeSoto ISD does not effectively implement and enforce purchasing practices to align with district policies and procedures and recommended TEA guidelines.

The Texas Association of School Boards' Board Policy CH (LOCAL) regarding purchasing and acquisition establishes the district's purchasing policy. As it relates to responsibility for debts and purchasing commitments, board policy states:

> The Board shall assume responsibility for debts incurred in the name of the district so long as those debts are for purchases made in accordance with the adopted budget, state law, Board policy, and the district's purchasing procedures. The Board shall not be responsible for debts incurred by persons or organizations not directly under Board control. Persons making unauthorized purchases shall assume full responsibility for all such debts.

This policy also states that:

> All purchase commitments shall be made by the Superintendent or designee in accordance with administrative procedures, including the district's purchasing procedures. District employees shall not be permitted to make purchases for personal use through the district's business office.

The district's General Financial Procedures Manual further outlines guidelines for all purchasing-related functions, to include purchasing requisitions, quotations, bids and awards, and emergency purchase orders. Some of the procedures related to purchasing state:

> From time to time it is recognized that situations will arise whose urgency will dictate immediate processing of purchase orders. Emergency requisitions can be accommodated when a true emergency exists. The following is an excerpt from the Texas Education Agency Financial Accountability System Resource Guide, paragraph 3.2.5.7: "Care should be taken that emergency purchases do not result from improper planning rather than from a true emergency. It is important that the school district attempts to eliminate purchases for non-emergency situations as much as possible and requires that all emergency purchases are fully justified." PLEASE NOTE: Lack of planning does not constitute grounds for approval of a "Rush Order."
>
> Unauthorized purchases or charges are subject to non-reimbursement of expense or the charge of the full purchase price to the employee. Anyone creating or authorizing a purchasing commitment prior to approval may be liable to prosecution under the Texas Penal Code, Chapter 39, Abuse of Office, Section 39.01.
>
> District purchasing procedures call for purchases of personal property in excess of $1,000 from non-bid vendors to be purchased by obtaining written price quotations from at least three vendors. (This option does not apply or is not available if the annual aggregate of $50,000 has been reached in a given category.)

Although the district established these purchasing guidelines, the district does not enforce them. In addition, the guidelines

do not reflect all purchasing practices in the district. The district's purchasing procedures lack clear provisions governing check requests or when to use check requests instead of purchase orders.

In July 2013, the district implemented an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system from Prologic Technology Systems, Inc., called Total Education Administrative Management Solution (TEAMS). ERP systems integrate core business processing functions that allow for real-time sharing of information across the organization. When following the purchase order process, authorized district employees submit requisitions for goods and services through the financial system procurement module. Authorized individuals approve the requisition as it proceeds through financial systems workflow, which terminates with the purchasing specialist. More specifically, each DeSoto ISD campus or department prepares and enters requisitions into the financial system for goods and services. Principals and department heads designate personnel authorized to execute purchase requisitions and purchase orders. The financial system generates a requisition only when sufficient funds are available in the budget. The purchasing specialist reviews the requisition to ensure the vendor and account information is correct and converts it into a purchase order. The purchasing specialist then sends the purchase order to the vendor by fax, mail, or email.

Although the district has an ERP system that creates an efficient and effective purchase order process, district staff routinely use alternate procurement methods to obtain goods and services.

Figure 7–4 shows a summary of purchase orders issued for fiscal years 2012 to 2014. The number of purchase orders decreased each year, and the purchase order expenditures fluctuated with a $5.7 million decrease from fiscal years 2012 to 2014.

FIGURE 7–4
DESOTO ISD PURCHASE ORDERS ISSUED
FISCAL YEARS 2012 TO 2014

YEAR	PURCHASE ORDERS	EXPENDITURES
2012	5,411	$26,448,587
2013	4,839	$14,183,848
2014	3,858	$20,722,959

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Financial System Purchase Order Report, February 2015.

The district's second method of acquiring goods and services is through the use of a check request. To purchase goods and services with a check request, district staff enter the necessary information into the financial system or complete a paper form. District staff provide the account name, vendor name and address, date requested, purpose of funds, amount, date, and requestor's signature. Once the requestor completes the form, an authorized individual, such as the requestor's supervisor or the campus principal, approves and forwards it to the Business and Financial Services Department, where department staff approve the payment and the check disbursement. The review team learned that the district uses check requests because some vendors refuse to accept a purchase order from the district due to delayed payments from the district. According to onsite interviews, staff use check requests to receive funds quickly due to poor planning on their part and not emergencies.

Purchase orders ensure that the district acquires only authorized goods and services. Check request purchases occur after the district receives the goods and services and are not as effective at ensuring that only authorized purchases occur. An approved check request authorizes payment, not purchase. In most instances, the district is made aware that an employee ordered goods and services without a purchase order when the vendor invoices the district for payment. The district also may receive an invoice without a purchase order or check request. In these situations, the accounts payable staff researches the invoice to determine who ordered the goods or services and whether to pay the invoice. The district refers to these types of payments as "accounts payable" invoices.

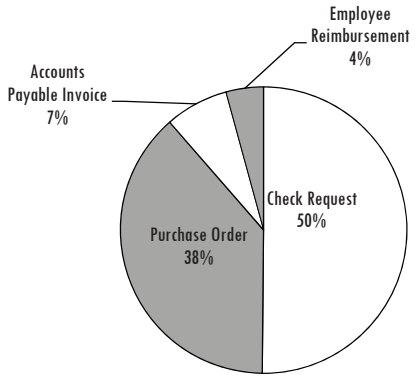
As related to purchases of personal property, which is property that is not land and buildings in excess of $1,000, district procedures state that staff should take the following steps:

- obtain three price quotes from vendors;
- confirm quotes in writing by mail, fax, or e-mail from the vendor;
- forward a copy of the quotes received from the vendors to the Purchasing Department for audit purposes;
- make purchases from the vendor offering the "best value" to the district; and
- as necessary, contact the Purchasing Department for a list of qualified vendors.

Although the Purchasing Department encourages campuses and departments to obtain additional quotes as the purchase price increases, campuses and departments do not consistently follow the policy, and the district does not enforce consequences. For example, district staff purchased embroidery items from one vendor and signs from another vendor without authorization or proper purchase orders. In both examples, the district's Purchasing Department became aware of these purchases when the vendor contacted the district requesting payment. The vendor delivered the items and assumed the district would provide payment because these items were district purchases.

The review team conducted an analysis of expenditures resulting from purchase orders, check requests, employee reimbursement, and accounts payable invoices. **Figure 7–5** shows expenditures by procurement method. The analysis revealed that the district used a check request for 50 percent of nonsalaried expenditures processed from July 2013 to March 2015. Even though disallowed by district policy, 4 percent of expenditures were reimbursed to employees for purchases made for the district.

FIGURE 7–5
DESOTO ISD EXPENDITURES BY PROCUREMENT METHOD JULY 2013 TO MARCH 2015

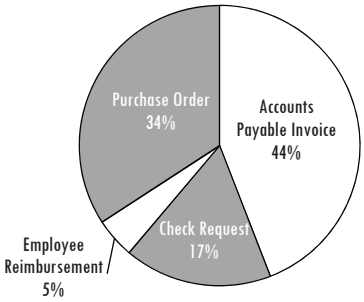


SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Financial Services Department-Financial System Expenditure Report, March 2015.

Figure 7–6 shows the number of checks issued using check requests, purchase orders, employee reimbursement, and accounts payable invoices. From July 2013 to March 2015, of the checks issued by the district 44 percent of checks were for check request purchases and 34 percent were for purchase orders.

Figure 7–7 shows check requests for expenditures greater than $50,000, from fiscal year 2014 to March 2015. The top 30 expenditures make up 74 percent of total expenditures made with a check request. The top 30 expenditures consisted of energy, food, academic program, insurance, and health-related payments. The remaining expenditures varied widely by vendor type and nature of expenditure.

FIGURE 7–6
DESOTO ISD CHECKS ISSUED BY PROCUREMENT METHOD JULY 2013 TO MARCH 2015



SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, March 2015; DeSoto ISD, Financial Services Department-Financial System Expenditure Report, March 2015.

The lack of enforcement of purchasing policies and procedures results in an environment in which users circumvent the purchasing process without consequence. In addition, it also results in district staff obtaining purchases without appropriate approval, specifically when staff request checks after receiving goods. Making purchases with check requests does not enable the system to obligate these funds as a purchase order does, which could result in overspent budget line items. Furthermore, without obtaining the required three quotes for purchases, the district could receive lesser value for purchases and potentially expend resources that the district could allocate to educational service delivery.

Effective entities ensure that staff use purchase orders for as many purchases as practical and limit check request purchases. Loyola University in New Orleans, Louisiana, outlines specific instances for check request purchases. The university's procurement policy allows check requests only for the following types of expenditures:

- membership and dues;
- travel and entertainment;
- conference fees;
- postage;
- periodicals;

FIGURE 7–7
DESOTO ISD CHECK REQUESTS GREATER THAN $50,000, BY CATEGORY
FISCAL YEAR 2014 TO MARCH 2015

VENDOR	AMOUNT	CATEGORY
Direct Energy Business–Dallas	$3,277,109	Utility service
Labatt Food Service	3,097,971	Food
Cyberlearning	1,577,000	Academic Program
City of DeSoto	699,650	City services
Oak Farms Dairy–Dallas	680,215	Food
Workers' Compensation Solutions	672,387	Insurance
Dell Financial Services	639,225	Lease
Superior Pediatric Care, Inc.	414,788	Medical
Texas Association of School Boards Risk Management Fund–Finance Department	387,280	Insurance
Atmos Energy	322,678	Utility service
Dallas County Schools	309,870	Transportation
Prologic Technology Systems, Inc.	231,274	Consulting fees
Prime Health Care Staffing, Inc.	222,420	Health
Higginbotham Insurance Agency	203,365	Insurance
Republic Services	196,246	Waste disposal
American Express Company	193,509	Credit card
Kurz & Co.	187,398	Construction
Region 10 Education Service Center	175,350	Security
North Star Services	136,843	Fund-raiser
City of Glenn Heights	135,845	Payroll services
Hellas Construction, Inc.	134,241	Construction
DeSoto Police Department	125,756	Security
Big Kahuna Fundraising	113,874	Food
First Financial Administrators, Inc.	108,362	Financial services
Knight Security Systems, LLC	103,847	Security
Nardone Brothers Baking Co.	94,498	Food
Zephyr Print Service	91,355	Print services
Bat Fire & Security Services	86,068	Fire alarm services
Cedar Valley College	75,847	Academic
Trident Beverage, Inc.	73,154	Food
Top 30 Check Request Vendors	**$14,767,425**	
Total Check Request Expenditures	**$20,009,762**	
Percentage of Total Expenditures	**74%**	

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Financial Services Department-Financial System Expenditure Report, March 2015.

- honoraria;
- professional fees;
- moving expenses; and
- awards.

If the expenditure type does not meet one of the reasons in the policy, university staff must procure the item with a purchase order, unless the total amount is less than $200. The university disallows purchases with check requests for specific items, because Loyola University is exempt from state sales tax. Some entities also implement blanket purchase orders when there is a recurring need for expendable goods.

DeSoto ISD should evaluate district purchasing procedures and practices to identify the steps needed to enforce compliance with policies and guidelines. The district should clarify in its procedures the use of a check request in place of purchase orders. The district should require documentation to justify a check request except in limited, predefined circumstances. Moreover, the district should inform vendors that desire to continue a business relationship with the district that they must accept a purchase order unless district practice or procedures indicate otherwise. The district should consider the use of blanket purchase orders for frequent, routine purchases, and also estimate and monitor the total usage as orders occur. Finally, the district should enforce provisions in its purchasing policy and procedures transferring the liability for unauthorized purchases to the buyer.

The CFO should instruct the director of financial services and the director of purchasing to work collaboratively to identify categories of purchases to allow check requests. The director of financial services and director of purchasing should amend the General Financial Procedures Manual to include a statement that restricts the use of the check requests for other types of expenditures (except those made on a purchasing card). The director of purchasing should notify all employees and vendors that the district would not honor unauthorized purchases. The CFO and director of financial services should enforce the procedures outlined in the manual and limit any exceptions. The district should implement these changes at the start of fiscal year 2016.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

VENDOR DATABASE (REC. 41)

DeSoto ISD lacks procedures to monitor the vendor database to maintain an accurate and updated vendor list to ensure staff use approved vendors when making purchases.

The district maintains a vendor database that includes information about each vendor, such as vendor identification number, name, address, and federal identification number. The purchasing specialist is the sole employee of the district responsible for establishing new vendors in the financial system. District staff determines which vendors to use based upon the vendor list. If district staff needs to use a new vendor, they provide the purchasing specialist with the required documentation to establish the vendor profile in the system.

After implementing the new financial system in July 2013, the district converted its records to this system at the beginning of fiscal year 2014. During the conversion process, the district purged its vendor database of inactive vendors and transferred information for vendors the district retained. Before this purge, the district did not exercise a regular practice of purging and maintaining an active vendor list. Previous vendors and new vendors received unique identification numbers in the financial system. **Figure 7–8** shows an analysis of the vendor database for the period July 2013 to March 2015. The district's database contained 3,834 vendor identification numbers, including 2,470 previous vendors and 1,364 new vendors. During this period, the district spent $37.9 million with 2,284 (60 percent) of its vendors and no expenditures with 1,550 (40 percent) of its vendors. There were nine duplicate vendor files.

FIGURE 7–8
DESOTO ISD ANALYSIS OF VENDOR DATABASE JULY 2013 TO MARCH 2015

CATEGORY	AMOUNT
Total Vendors in System	3,834
Vendors with Expenditures	2,284
Amount of Vendor Expenditures	$37,927,190
Percentage of Vendors with Expenditures	60%
Vendors with Zero Expenditures	1,550
Percentage of Vendors with Zero Expenditures	40%
Multiple Vendor IDs	9

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Financial System Download of Vendor Database, March 2015.

Although the district purged the vendor list at the beginning of fiscal year 2014, the system continues to maintain inactive vendor records. The existence of inactive vendor records could result in an opportunity for a dishonest employee to divert district funds. Effective districts conduct periodic reviews of their vendor lists to identify and flag inactive vendors and deactivate or remove them from the database.

In the white paper *Solving the Vendor Master File Conundrum,* a multinational firm specializing in audit recovery services outlined the benefits of purging vendor databases to avoid having too many unused vendors. Such benefits include reduction of costly duplicate payments; prevention and detection of fraud; and boosts in productivity. The report also outlined the following best practices for avoiding vendor database problems:

- establish clear standards for vendor setup and coding;
- establish a habit of checking whether the vendor has been entered before setting up a new vendor;
- establish fixed intervals for vendor database cleanup; and
- implement a vendor portal.

DeSoto ISD should establish a process for reviewing and deactivating dormant vendors and periodically purging the district's vendor database. The district should consider the guidelines in the best practice.

The director of purchasing and the purchasing specialist should develop protocols for reviewing and purging the vendor database. The director of purchasing should instruct the purchasing specialist to review inactive vendors on the database and recommend them for purging. The purchasing specialist should maintain a record of purging activities, and should develop and maintain a schedule for future vendor database reviews and purges.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

AGGREGATE PURCHASES (REC. 42)

DeSoto ISD does not maximize its financial system to monitor and track aggregate purchases to ensure compliance with state law.

The Texas Education Code, Section 44.031, requires school districts to use one of several competitive purchasing methods when contracting for goods or services valued at $50,000 or more in the aggregate for each 12-month period. The district purchases most of its goods and services via cooperative purchasing arrangements. Cooperative purchasing arrangements increase the purchasing power of school districts and simplify the procurement process. DeSoto ISD participates in several cooperative purchasing arrangements. However, being part of a purchasing cooperative may not always guarantee that all entities satisfy procedural procurement requirements in accordance with all applicable local policies, regulations, or state laws including competitive bidding.

Before fiscal year 2014, the district used a spreadsheet to track aggregate purchases and to identify purchases requiring bids. The district abandoned this tracking method because it was tedious, manually intensive, and inadequate to achieve the district's purpose. However, the district has not developed another method for tracking aggregate purchases. The district's financial system is capable of tracking aggregate purchases; however, the review team learned that purchasing staff lacks the training necessary to retrieve the information from the system.

Failure to track and use aggregate purchase data exposes the district to violations of state law and poses a risk that the district would not obtain the best value for its goods and services. Moreover, the district does not fully benefit from the investment in its financial system.

Effective districts use financial systems to track aggregate purchases using commodity codes. Commodity codes track spending for goods and services to enable districts to determine which commodities to bid. Examples of commodities from a district's commodity code list include air conditioning, building materials and supplies, classroom supplies, equipment rental, and kitchen supplies. Katy ISD's Purchasing Department is responsible for ensuring compliance with the aggregation rules of the Texas Education Code, Chapter 44. To determine the level of expenditures, the Purchasing Department developed a grouping of commodity categories based on those listed in TEA's FASRG. The department groups the commodities so that purchasing contract awards occur competitively. This process ensures that schools and departments receive the best value for their budget expenditures and comply with all statutes, policies, and procedures. Katy ISD provides a complete listing of all commodity groupings and procurement contracts on its website at www.katyisd.org.

DeSoto ISD should implement a process to begin tracking the district's aggregate purchases by extracting the data from the financial system. The district should track these expenditures by commodity code. The district should seek the assistance of the financial system consultants to learn how to extract the data that is necessary to ensure the district is, and remains, in compliance with aggregate purchasing requirements.

The CFO should instruct the director of purchasing to seek the assistance of TEAMS consultants to extract purchases by commodity from the financial system. The director of purchasing should provide training to staff responsible for using the system regarding how to extract this information. The director of purchasing should extract the information from the system monthly and use it to monitor and analyze the purchases for compliance.

The fiscal impact of this recommendation cannot be determined until the scope and cost of consulting services are determined.

WAREHOUSE INVENTORY MANAGEMENT (REC. 43)

DeSoto ISD lacks a process to manage warehouse inventory.

The district only maintains inventory for paper and janitorial supplies. The warehouse manager orders paper and janitorial supplies and stores these supplies on pallets and shelves in a section of the district's warehouse. However, these supplies are accessible to other district departments that share space in this facility. The district does not have a means of tracking, controlling, safeguarding, and inventorying items stored in the warehouse. Moreover, boxes are stored on unmarked shelves and pallets without a formal system of storing and removing items for delivery. When staff request supplies from the warehouse manager, and the Business and Finance Services Department verifies availability of funds, the manager removes the supplies from the warehouse and ensures delivery. **Figures 7–9** and **7–10** show the location of the supplies in the warehouse. The pictures show that the department does not label the shelves indicating the type or number of items stored.

The district purchases paper from one co-op vendor but uses several vendors for janitorial supplies. The warehouse manager indicated that the district receives 120–150 cases of paper weekly. The district contracts for custodial operations for all campuses except Cockrell Hill Elementary, Ruby Young Elementary, and the district's administrative complex on Beltline Road. These three locations still receive janitorial supplies because district custodians are responsible for cleaning these buildings. **Figure 7–11** shows an overview of janitorial and paper supply expenditures from fiscal year 2014 to March 2015. The district tracks expenditure information from the district's financial system. Expenditures for janitorial supplies remain relatively low because the amounts are only for three locations cleaned by district staff. The district spent $255,794 to purchase janitorial and paper supplies during this period, which represents an average of $13,463 per month.

Although the district has an automated system to track supply expenditures, the district lacks a similar system to track, control, and monitor the volume and use of supplies without manually gathering the information from invoices. As a result, the district cannot plan expenditures or monitor usage by location or timeframe. The district cannot control its stocking costs and does not know the value of its janitorial and paper supply inventories. Furthermore, the district does not inventory supplies in stock and therefore cannot reconcile accounting records compared to stock. The district's financial system includes a warehouse inventory system module that is capable of interacting with procurement, accounts payable, and receiving functionalities. The warehouse inventory system module also features an online requisition with approval, and the system manages and updates inventory counts. However, DeSoto ISD does not use this module because district staff consider the module to be more complicated than necessary.

The absence of a method of tracking, controlling, safeguarding, and inventorying paper and janitorial supplies stored in the warehouse exposes the district to the risk of undetected loss and theft.

The lack of information in a readily available format prevents the district from making data-driven decisions with respect to its janitorial and paper supply inventories. Therefore, the warehouse manager makes purchases based on experience and intuition rather than historical data and purchasing trends, from which the district could establish cost-effective stock reorder points based on costs of acquisition, storage, handling, and inventory investment.

The lack of purchase and usage data also precludes the preparation of inventory reports, which effective districts assign someone other than the warehouse manager to review. Effective districts implement a supervisory review and

FIGURE 7–9
DESOTO ISD JANITORIAL SUPPLIES, FACILITY AT 200 W. PARKERVILLE ROAD
FEBRUARY 2015

SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board, School Review Team, February 2015.

FIGURE 7–10
DESOTO ISD PAPER SUPPLIES, FACILITY AT 200 W. PARKERVILLE ROAD
FEBRUARY 2015

SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board, School Review Team, February 2015.

FIGURE 7–11
DESOTO ISD JANITORIAL AND PAPER SUPPLY EXPENDITURES
FISCAL YEAR 2014 TO MARCH 2015

SUPPLY	2014	2015	TOTAL
Janitorial	$69,454	$54,164	$123,618
Paper	$72,892	$59,284	$132,176
Total	**$142,346**	**$113,448**	**$255,794**

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Financial System Expenditure Report, March 2015.

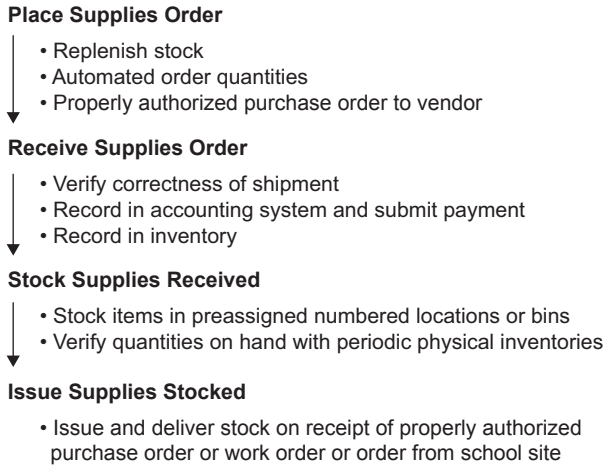
approval of such reports to introduce a layer of accountability for supply inventory. These accountability steps strengthen inventory controls, and inform and protect the district and manager from unforeseen loss or theft.

The New Mexico Public Education Department publishes the *New Mexico Manual of Procedures for Public School Accounting and Budget*. The manual sets standards for accounting methods and procedures used by schools and agencies within the state of New Mexico. Supplement 10, regarding warehouse and supply inventory, establishes policies and procedures necessary to ensure warehouse supplies are "purchased economically, stored efficiently and safely, and rotated to be used within their economic life." **Figure 7–12** shows New Mexico's centralized receiving model to guide districts through the process. Some of the guidelines represented in this model include automating order quantities, verifying correctness of shipment, stocking items in preassigned numbered locations, and issuing and delivering stock upon receipt of properly authorized purchase orders.

The PASB outlines the following warehouse inventory procedures, which could be considered best practices for school warehouses of all types and sizes:

- number each warehouse item category, keeping like items together;
- set up an automated inventory control program using either purchased or in-house software to:
  - manage inventory items by category types: mechanical, custodial, tools, technology, instructional, and food services;
  - track all inventory transactions, including issues, receipts, returns, adjustments, orders, and transfers; and
  - allow inventory to be issued to a location, project, work order, or employee;
- assign responsibility for maintaining and ordering stock items to one employee; physical counts are to be supervised by the business office;
- report any unusual requests or suspicious orders for abnormal quantities noted or discovered during periodic reviews to the business office;
- determine quantity of items to be stocked using the previous year's activities or transactions and considering any changing conditions that would affect quantities needed; and

FIGURE 7–12
NEW MEXICO PUBLIC SCHOOLS CENTRALIZED RECEIVING MODEL
JULY 2011



SOURCE: *New Mexico Manual of Procedures for Public School Accounting and Budget*, July 2011.

- use a perpetual inventory system for an accurate account of warehouse stock.

DeSoto ISD should establish practices and procedures to strengthen internal controls of janitorial and paper supply inventories in the district's warehouse. The warehouse manager should develop a means of tracking, monitoring, safeguarding, and inventorying such supplies to avoid financial loss and establish accountability. The warehouse manager should first use the functionality of the warehouse module available in the district's financial system. While the district's circumstances would not warrant the full use of the functionality of the warehouse module, the district should explore which features to use that would strengthen controls of janitorial and paper supplies.

The CFO should instruct the director of plant services, director of purchasing, the warehouse manager, and the director of technology services to review the features, functionality, and requirements of the warehouse module to determine how the system could be adapted and scaled down to meet the district's needs.

The director of plant services, director of purchasing, and the warehouse manager should determine if consulting services or training is needed to adapt the module to the district's needs. If the district is not able to adapt the warehouse module to meet its needs, the director of plant services, director of purchasing, and the warehouse manager should devise an alternative means of tracking, monitoring, safeguarding, and inventorying janitorial and custodial supplies incorporating the principles and best practices outlined in the PASB developed by the New Mexico education department.

The fiscal impact of this recommendation cannot be determined until the need for consulting services is determined. The district staff would need to estimate the scope and cost if the district determines that consulting services are needed.

FISCAL IMPACT

Some of the recommendations provided in this report are based on state or federal laws, rules, or regulations, and should be promptly addressed. Other recommendations are based on comparisons to state or industry standards, or accepted best practices, and should be reviewed to determine the level of priority, appropriate timeline, and method of implementation.

RECOMMENDATION		2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	TOTAL 5–YEAR (COSTS) OR SAVINGS	ONE–TIME (COSTS) OR SAVINGS
CHAPTER 7. PURCHASING								
40.	Evaluate district purchasing procedures and practices to identify the steps needed to enforce compliance with policies and guidelines.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
41.	Establish a process for reviewing and deactivating dormant vendors and periodically purging the district's vendor database.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
42.	Implement a process to begin tracking the district's aggregate purchases by extracting the data from the financial system.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
43.	Establish practices and procedures to strengthen internal controls of janitorial and paper supply inventories in the district's warehouse.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
TOTAL		**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**

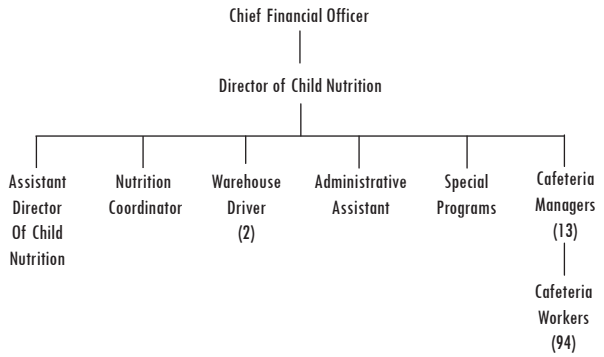
CHAPTER 8. CHILD NUTRITION

An independent school district's food service operation provides meals to its students and staff. The district may provide meals through the federally funded Child Nutrition Programs, which include the School Breakfast and National School Lunch programs. The School Breakfast Program is a federal entitlement program administered at the state level by the Texas Department of Agriculture. Participating schools receive cash assistance for breakfasts served that comply with program requirements. Districts receive different amounts of reimbursement based on the number of breakfasts served in each of the benefit categories: free, reduced-price, and paid. Texas state law requires schools to participate in the breakfast program if at least 10 percent of their students are eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals. The National School Lunch Program serves low-cost or free lunches to students. Like the breakfast program, lunches must comply with federal nutrition guidelines and are reimbursable to schools based on the number of meals served within the benefit categories. A district's food service operation may offer catering services as a way to supplement the food services budget or to provide training for students interested in pursuing careers in the food service industry.

Food service operation is dependent on the organizational structure of the district. The three primary models of organizing food service operations are self-management, contracted management, and contracted consulting. Using the self-management model, a district operates its food service department without assistance from an outside entity. Using a contracted management model, a district contracts with a food service management company to manage either all or a portion of its operations. In this arrangement, a district may rely on the company to provide all or some staff, or it may use district staff for its operations. Using a consulting model, a district contracts with a food service consulting company to provide guidance on food service operations (e.g., menus, sales and marketing plans, and ordering processes based on industry standards, etc.). In this arrangement, district staff would operate the food service department.

DeSoto Independent School District (ISD) operates its Child Nutrition Department using the self-management model, and the district's director of child nutrition manages all aspects of food service operations. **Figure 8–1** shows DeSoto ISD's Child Nutrition Department's organization. The Child Nutrition Department has 114 employees at 13 campuses and the central administration facility. The special programs position is considered to be a function of DeSoto ISD's Child Nutrition Department.

FIGURE 8–1
DESOTO ISD CHILD NUTRITION DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATION
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15



SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

Child nutrition employees receive three days of in-district training each summer in addition to attending a Regional Education Service Center X (Region 10) summer workshop. Summer workshops at Region 10 help employees to receive hands-on experience in meeting the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) meal pattern requirements and Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) recommendations. The district provides a stipend of an additional $0.18 to $0.84 per hour worked to each child nutrition staff member for each certification level achieved through the Texas Association for School Nutrition (TASN) and other accredited programs. TASN provides resources that enhance and promote nonprofit child nutrition programs. TASN certifications begin with basic food service skills and advance to managerial and administrative levels. All DeSoto ISD child nutrition employees are eligible to receive the stipend, including workers, managers, the assistant director, and the director. Nineteen child nutrition employees have earned a certification

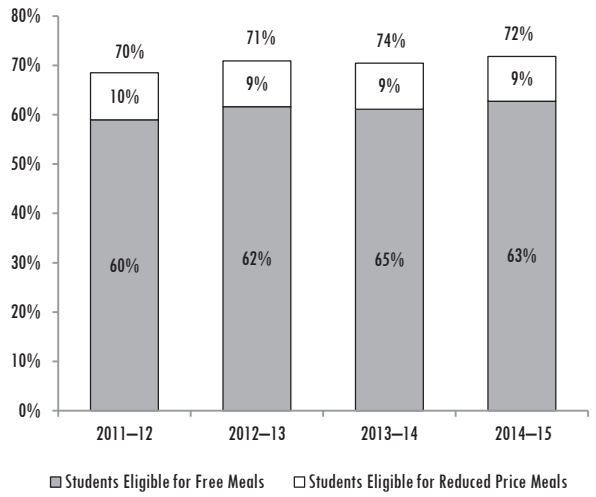
through TASN. Twenty-three members of the cafeteria staff have a ServSafe certification issued by the National Restaurant Association. The ServSafe program provides up-to-date and comprehensive educational materials to the restaurant industry. The ServSafe program is accredited by the American National Standards Institute–Conference for Food Protection, and is recognized by federal, state and local jurisdictions. To obtain the ServSafe certification, the Child Nutrition Department staff receives training in basic food safety, personal hygiene, cross-contamination and allergens, time and temperature control, and cleaning and sanitation.

The district's Child Nutrition Department generates revenues from providing meals to students and staff. The largest percentage of revenue comes from serving meals to students who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. DeSoto ISD offers free breakfast to all students, regardless of their household income, through the federal Universal School Breakfast Program (USB). DeSoto ISD uses direct certification to gather information regarding each family's government assistance status from the appropriate agency to certify and qualify students to receive free meals. Families that do not receive direct certification must complete an application through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) on the district's website. The district requests that each family complete the federal free and reduced-price meal application at the beginning of each school year. Child nutrition staff assists families in completing the application. Additionally, DeSoto ISD offers free breakfast and lunch to all students age 18 or younger during the summer through the Summer Feeding Program. DeSoto ISD follows a closed campus policy, which requires students to remain on campus during their lunch periods.

Figure 8–2 shows the percent of DeSoto ISD's student population eligible for free and reduced-price meals for school years 2011–12 to 2014–15. The percentage of DeSoto ISD students identified as eligible for free and reduced-price meals remained steady in school years 2011–12 to 2012–13 at approximately 70 percent, and increased to 72 percent in school year 2014–15.

Effective food service operations are self-supporting because they generate enough revenue to cover operating costs. DeSoto ISD's Child Nutrition Department receives revenue from the state and federal governments for each meal served. Full-priced student meals, adult meals, and catering generate additional revenues. Revenues that exceed the operating expenditures make up the fund balance. **Figure 8–3** shows DeSoto ISD's revenues, expenditures, and fund balance from fiscal years 2010 to 2014. The Child Nutrition Department's fund balance increased from $553,212 in fiscal year 2010 to $1.9 million in fiscal year 2014. For fiscal year 2014, the Child Nutrition Department received 75 percent of its revenue from federal funds.

FIGURE 8–2
DESOTO ISD FREE AND REDUCED–PRICE MEAL ELIGIBILITY SCHOOL YEARS 2011–12 TO 2014–15



SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Eligibility Summary Report, school years 2011–12 to 2014–15.

ACCOMPLISHMENT

- DeSoto ISD's Child Nutrition Department implemented a variety of management and operations controls, resulting in an increased fund balance from fiscal years 2010 to 2014.

FINDINGS

- DeSoto ISD does not have a formal process guiding the operational decisions of the Child Nutrition Department.
- DeSoto ISD lacks a process to evaluate the Child Nutrition Department's financial status and annually ensure the program is operating efficiently.
- DeSoto ISD's Child Nutrition Department has not maximized its marketing efforts to consistently increase student meal participation.

FIGURE 8–3
DESOTO ISD CHILD NUTRITION REVENUES, EXPENDITURES, AND FUND BALANCE
FISCAL YEARS 2010 TO 2014

	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014	
CATEGORY	AMOUNT	PERCENTAGE	AMOUNT	PERCENTAGE	AMOUNT	PERCENTAGE	AMOUNT	PERCENTAGE	AMOUNT	PERCENTAGE
REVENUES										
Local	$1,535,556	32%	$1,384,633	29%	$1,281,729	27%	$1,316,116	26%	$1,314,756	24%
State	$82,769	2%	$70,140	1%	$60,185	1%	$50,081	1%	$30,492	1%
Federal	$3,155,718	66%	$3,377,044	70%	$3,481,439	72%	$3,709,599	73%	$4,096,452	75%
Total Revenues	**$4,774,043**	**100%**	**$4,831,817**	**100%**	**$4,823,353**	**100%**	**$5,075,796**	**100%**	**$5,441,700**	**100%**
EXPENDITURES										
Food Services	($4,620,642)	97%	($4,350,456)	90%	($4,688,843)	97%	($4,490,911)	88%	($4,948,988)	91%
Plant Services	($11,924)	0.25%	($5,946)	0.12%	($106,905)	2%	($111,199)	2%	($109,184)	2%
Total Expenditures	**($4,632,566)**	**97%**	**($4,356,402)**	**90%**	**($4,795,748)**	**99%**	**($4,602,110)**	**91%**	**($5,058,172)**	**93%**
Net Profit (Loss)	$141,477	3%	$475,415	10%	$27,605	1%	$473,686	9%	$383,528	7%
Prior Period Adjustment					($53,704)	(1%)				
Fund Balance	**$553,212**		**$1,028,627**		**$1,002,528**		**$1,476,214**		**1,859,742**	

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Audited Financial Statements for Fiscal Years 2010 to 2014.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 44: Develop and implement a districtwide child nutrition strategic plan.**
- **Recommendation 45: Develop detailed financial reports generated from the district's information system, and include comparative analysis in financial and management reports to guide the director of child nutrition in daily operations and planning.**
- **Recommendation 46: Implement innovative district food service programs to increase students' meal participation.**

DETAILED ACCOMPLISHMENT

MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS

DeSoto ISD's Child Nutrition Department implemented a variety of management and operations controls, resulting in an increased fund balance from fiscal years 2010 to 2014.

DeSoto ISD's chief financial officer (CFO) contracted with an external consultant to assist the director of child nutrition in implementing controls aimed at reducing costs, improving productivity, and increasing meal participation. These controls included:

- developing monthly financial reports by campus;
- controlling and monitoring inventory levels;
- conducting monthly meetings with all cafeteria managers to discuss operational outcomes;
- discussing financial results, issues, and accomplishments;
- focusing on the serving line food presentation, including staff uniforms; and
- developing more efficient preparation menus.

The combination of these activities resulted in a child nutrition fund balance of approximately $1.9 million in fiscal year 2014. To maintain the nonprofit status required for child nutrition services, the NSLP states that a food service program must not exceed more than three months' operational expenses accumulated in its fund balance. DeSoto ISD's Child Nutrition Department's fiscal year 2014 fund balance of $1.9 million equals approximately four months of operational expenses, which is slightly higher than

the recommended three months' operational expenses of $1.2 million.

Figures 8–4 and **8–5** show the changes the Child Nutrition Department made to the district's food service facilities, expending $781,730 of the fund balance in fiscal year 2014 to renovate a kitchen. In summer 2014, the district remodeled or updated kitchens and equipment to operate more efficiently; worked to establish appealing cafeterias for students to dine in; and updated the serving line layout, food presentation, and food offerings.

DeSoto ISD's Child Nutrition Department received the following awards in school year 2014–15 for its operations:

- Cream of Crop Award from Region 10 for increasing breakfast participation by 10 percent;
- TDA's Local Products Challenge for using Texas products in school meals during National School Lunch Week; and
- direct certification award of $545 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for the program's direct certification of student eligibility of free or reduced-price meals.

Implementing a variety of controls in the child nutrition operations enabled the district to improve its kitchens, progressively increase the program's fund balance, and receive awards and recognition for its efficient operations.

FIGURE 8–4
DESOTO ISD FRANK D. MOATES ELEMENTARY CAFETERIA SERVING LINE
FEBRUARY 2015

Source: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, February 2015.

FIGURE 8–5
DESOTO ISD FRANK D. MOATES ELEMENTARY CAFETERIA ADDITIONS
FEBRUARY 2015

Frozen juice machines.

Deli-style foods available.

Source: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, February 2015.

DETAILED FINDINGS

STRATEGIC PLANNING (REC. 44)

DeSoto ISD does not have a formal process guiding the operational decisions of the Child Nutrition Department.

Although the director of child nutrition worked with an external consultant to improve operations, the district has not developed a strategic plan to identify a department mission and to ensure consistency with child nutrition services. The district projects revenues based on the previous school year's revenue and the anticipated student enrollment for the upcoming year. In review team interviews, staff reported that DeSoto ISD's Child Nutrition Department's managers make decisions based on daily operational needs and the availability of funds without a long-term analysis of the effects of those decisions. The decision to replace or upgrade cafeteria equipment is determined during the annual budget process based on the available fund balance instead of a plan that projects equipment changes and needs. Although the district has increased its fund balance and made improvements in its kitchens, the department does not engage in a planning process with district and community stakeholders to ensure that the Child Nutrition Department continues to meet the needs of its growing student population. The district's student enrollment increased from school year 2012–13 to 2014–15 by about 9 percent. The district's Board of Trustees has not engaged in a strategic planning process; however, the superintendent and his executive leadership team developed the Full Engagement 2015 document to guide overall district planning. This document does not include child nutrition services goals or objectives.

The district's Child Nutrition Department lacks:

- documented operating or financial plans to ensure uniform direction;
- formal marketing plans to guide improvements in cafeteria food quality, staff service, and the dining area environment; and
- coordination with local organizations to enhance the summer feeding program.

Effective districts engage in a long-term planning process, such as strategic planning, to maintain and sustain their child nutrition services. Strategic planning is a management tool used to help an organization focus its energy towards common objectives; ensure that members of the organization work towards the same goals; and assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment. Strategic planning provides the foundation for a structured effort to produce decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future. Developing a strategic plan for child nutrition operations enables districts to more effectively manage the programs' operational elements.

Brownsville ISD's Food Services Department developed a three-year strategic plan to assist in meeting departmental goals and objectives. Food service staff met for strategic planning sessions to identify the department's core purpose and develop a systematic guide to achieve that purpose. The department incorporated the district's goals into its strategic plan and considered the unique needs of the food service function. Cafeteria managers contributed to setting the annual goals, while supervisors assessed the strategic effects of these goals. The department solicited input from its customer base and from its employees, and then formulated a plan to correct those areas within its control. The Brownsville ISD staff annually evaluates progress in meeting the mission statement in the strategic plan and formulates an action plan for the next school year. The action plans contain seven goals and identify the objectives of each goal. The plan contains action steps to meet each goal and objective and requires a completion date to track progress toward each goal.

DeSoto ISD should develop and implement a districtwide child nutrition strategic plan. To facilitate this process, the director of child nutrition should work with the CFO to engage in a strategic planning process for the Child Nutrition Department. The process should identify the department's approach to providing healthy and nutritious meals to students in an efficient and cost-effective manner. The plan should serve as a framework to guide short- and long-term decision making and assist the district in managing the child nutrition services efficiently and effectively. The strategic plan should include:

- identification of key program stakeholders and their desires, needs, and preferences regarding child nutrition services;
- a Child Nutrition Department mission statement;
- quantifiable goals and objectives so efficiency and effectiveness could be measured, monitored and reported;

- strategies with detailed action plans to implement program goals and objectives that could be monitored and reported; and
- a method to report plan results and tactics to resolve any unfavorable deviations from the plan or to make appropriate adjustments to the plan.

The plan should project the financial revenue and expenditures for the next three to five years. It should include assumptions regarding changes such as shifts in the demographics of the student population or needed major equipment purchases and facility renovations. This approach helps to ensure an adequate program fund balance. Because federal regulations prohibit school districts from accumulating a fund balance in excess of three months' average operating expenses without a planned use of the surplus, a documented financial plan would clarify the planned use of a program surplus.

The following district positions should be involved in the development and implementation of the Child Nutrition Department's strategic plan:

- director of child nutrition;
- assistant director of child nutrition;
- nutrition coordinator;
- CFO;
- director of financial services; and
- cafeteria managers.

The director of child nutrition should schedule and facilitate strategic planning sessions with these staff. The director should complete the planning sessions during the second semester of school year 2015–16. After the director compiles the information from the strategic planning sessions, the CFO should present it to the board for approval. Additionally, the director of child nutrition should establish formalized processes to guide the child nutrition services operations and to review and update the strategic plan prior to the budget planning process each fiscal year.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT (REC. 45)

DeSoto ISD lacks a process to evaluate the Child Nutrition Department's financial status and annually ensure the program is operating efficiently.

The district's CFO is responsible for preparing child nutrition financial statements and monitoring operations using the district's financial management system; however, the monthly financial statements contain the revenues and expenditures consolidated for both the breakfast and lunch programs instead of reporting each by revenue type and expenditure category. The CFO does not separate the financial records for breakfast and lunch. In addition, the district's annual financial statements detail revenues by source, but consolidate the Child Nutrition Department's operations, facilities maintenance, and utilities operations into the single category food services. The Business and Finance Services Department staff prepares monthly account reconciliations for the Child Nutrition Department, however; financial statements prepared at the district level do not provide the adequate detail needed, making it challenging for the director of child nutrition to manage the program because these reports do not allow for comparative analysis. In addition, the CFO does not use the district's financial data to determine if the self-managed operation remains beneficial for the district.

The lack of detailed child nutrition financial reports and support led to the district's inconsistent financial reporting to TDA for the NSLP and USB, and resulted in inefficient processes for ensuring the program's financial success. **Figure 8–6** shows a comparison of the fiscal year 2014 financial report submitted to TDA and the fiscal year 2014 audited financial statements for the Child Nutrition Department. In the financial report submitted to TDA, DeSoto ISD overstated the total revenue by $2.1 million. In addition, the district stated its total expenditures of $5.6 million in the original report, $5.2 million in the revised report, and slightly more than $5.0 million in the audited financial statements. The reporting of the fund balance follows the same trend, with a reported overstatement of $1.9 million.

Figure 8–7 shows that the Child Nutrition Department management effectively handles the department's human and financial assets in comparison to key success factors. The Child Nutrition Department also performs well relative to a number of key success factors for school food service at the campus level.

FIGURE 8–6
DESOTO ISD CHILD NUTRITION FINANCIAL REPORTING COMPARISON
FISCAL YEAR 2014

DESCRIPTION	NSLP REPORT	NSLP REVISED REPORT	AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS	REVISED REPORT LESS AUDITED FINANCIALS
Beginning fund balance	$1,476,214	$1,476,214	$1,476,214	
Program revenues	$1,314,756	$1,314,756		$1,314,756
Local			$1,314,756	$(1,314,756)
State	$30,492	$30,492	$30,492	
Federal	$4,927,633	$4,927,633	$4,096,452	$831,181
Nonprogram revenue	$1,343,406	$1,343,406		$1,343,406
Interest	$825	$825		$825
Total revenues	**$7,617,112**	**$7,617,112**	**$5,441,700**	**$2,175,412**
Payroll (salaries and benefits)	$1,773,439	$1,773,439		$1,773,439
Contracted services	$231,992	$122,808		$122,808
Utilities and plant services	$109,184	$109,184	$109,184	
Food	$2,455,666	$2,455,666		$2,455,666
Nonprogram food expenditures	$38,286	$38,286		$38,286
Supplies	$99,251	$100,936		$100,936
Indirect and other expenditures	$195,187	$195,187		$195,187
Other				
Equipment purchases/ capital	$780,355	$453,983		$453,983
Food services			$4,948,988	($4,948,988)
USDA commodities				
Total expenses	**$5,683,360**	**$5,249,489**	**$5,058,172**	**$191,317**
Net profit (loss)	$1,933,752	$2,367,623	$383,528	$1,984,095
Ending fund balance	**$3,409,966**	**$3,843,838**	**$1,859,742**	**$1,984,096**

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, National School Lunch Program Financial Reports and Audited Financial Statements, Fiscal Year 2014.

According to Controlling Cost in the Food Service Industry, by Dorothy Pannell-Martin, 1998, the top requirement for cost control management is an accounting system with procedures that provide accurate and timely financial information and reports. Effective districts compare profit and loss statements each month, and to statements from the same month of the previous year, to identify sudden changes or possible errors. Additionally, school districts distribute profit and loss statements to each campus within 10 days of month ending. **Figure 8–8** shows DeSoto ISD's financial and management reports compared to the seven industry-standard financial reporting tools. The figure shows how DeSoto ISD uses and distributes the reports. The cafeteria managers receive four of the seven standard financial reporting tools.

Figure 8–9 shows an example of a school district's food service monthly financial statement. Effective districts generate monthly financial statements summarizing revenues by source and expenditures by category. This example

FIGURE 8–7
DESOTO ISD CHILD NUTRITION COMPARED TO KEY SUCCESS FACTORS
FEBRUARY 2015

MEASURE	DESOTO ISD
Financial Position	The Child Nutrition Department is in a sound financial position with a $1.9 million program fund balance at the end of the 2014 fiscal year.
Financial Management	Financial reporting implemented at the campus level.
Food Costs	The program's 45 percent food cost is within industry standards. This percentage indicates that the district implements effective food cost control systems into campus food service operations.
Initiatives to enhance the quality and nutrition of meals served to students	The nutrition coordinator works with staff to develop nutritious menus and to improve the quality and merchandising of meals served in the cafeterias.
Best practices awards for serving healthy and nutritious meals	Through the leadership of the child nutrition program, district campuses receive awards. Additionally, all campuses apply for the USDA HealthierUS School Challenge designation.
Leadership in working with students to embrace nutrition standards	The director of child nutrition and the nutrition coordinator speak in classrooms about nutrition. The program also develops activities to introduce students to new foods, and the serving lines present food in an appealing manner.
Program compliance	The program is in compliance with USDA Child Nutrition Program and local health department regulations.

SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board, School Review Team, February 2015.

financial statement compares the budget to actual results in each of these categories.

Effective districts use these financial statements to:

- highlight areas of strength in addition to improvement needs;
- compare previous periods to identify trends, improvements, and decreases, allowing management to take appropriate steps in a timely manner;
- monitor and track key operating and financial measures (for example, net profit or loss, student participation, meals per labor hour, food costs, and wages);
- hold campus child nutrition staff accountable for operations; and
- determine if the district's method of management, self or contracted, is efficient and cost-effective.

DeSoto ISD should develop detailed financial reports generated from the district's information system, and include comparative analysis in financial and management reports to guide the director of child nutrition in daily operations and planning. In addition, DeSoto ISD should implement a process to regularly analyze the Child Nutrition Department's self-managed operations to ensure it remains financially sound and beneficial for the district.

The director of child nutrition should work with the director of financial services to develop detailed financial reports using the district's information system. The director of child nutrition should generate monthly financial statements from the district's information system and analyze the results to take appropriate action. Additionally, the director of child nutrition should use district-generated financial reports as a basis for reporting to TDA.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

STUDENT MEAL PARTICIPATION (REC. 46)

DeSoto ISD's Child Nutrition Department has not maximized its marketing efforts to consistently increase student meal participation.

The DeSoto ISD Child Nutrition Department improved food offerings on the serving line through menu changes and offering wider selections. The department also promotes healthy eating and introduces new foods through various activities such as special posters; taste testing of new foods; and giving away small items such as pencils and erasers, soccer balls, drawings for movie tickets, T-shirts, and caps. The nutrition coordinator reviews all cafeteria manager production records and menu planning, generates recipes from the NUTRIKIDS point-of-sale (POS) system, and conducts classroom visits to discuss healthy eating and other nutrition topics. NUTRIKIDS is a point-of-sale software

FIGURE 8–8
DESOTO ISD FINANCIAL AND MANAGEMENT REPORTING COMPARISON
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

REPORT	USES	FREQUENCY	DESOTO ISD	DISTRIBUTED TO CAFETERIAS
Budget: Shows a plan for financial management according to each account.	Enables informed decisions and financial forecasts for the next year through the use of historical, economic, and demographic data, projected enrollment, menu changes, and changes in operational procedures. Enables a forecast of financial performance for the next year. Enables comparisons among actual and forecasted performance.	Annually with monthly monitoring.	Yes—generated by account codes instead of category names	No
Costing food and service.	Assists informed decision making about purchases and the continuation of products and services.	Daily	Yes—The director of child nutrition prepares meal costs based on invoices and labor based on hourly wages instead of using financial reports generated from the district's financial system.	Yes
Revenue received from lunch and breakfast.	Allows identification of major sources of revenue such as free, reduced-price, paid, a la carte, or other.	Daily	Not at the financial statement level—The district consolidates revenues and expenditures into breakfast and lunch programs instead of by revenue source or expenditure category. However, the director of child nutrition prepares internal financial reports by revenue type using the point-of-sale system.	Yes
Balance Sheet: Shows the financial position of the account at a given time.	Enables a comparison of balances with previous end-of-month or previous-year balances at the end of the month of the prior year.	Monthly	No	No
Profit and Loss Statement: Shows the balance after all expenditures are paid.	Enables identification and analysis of increases or decreases in participation or expenditures. Enables identification of which campus is making a profit or experiencing a loss. Assists administrators in determining where key issues or problems exist.	Weekly or Monthly	Yes—The director of child nutrition prepares meal costs based on invoices and labor based on hourly wages instead of using financial reports generated from the district's financial system.	Yes
Statement of Changes: Shows changes in working capital from year to year.	Assists in the monitoring of net increases in working capital requirements.	Annually	Limited to the annual financial report prepared by the district's external auditor.	No
Key Operating Percentages: Trends, Expenditures, and Revenues across periods.	Enables management and staff to monitor expenditures across periods including: • Food cost percentage • Labor cost percentage • Other costs percentage • Break-even point • Inventory turnover • Participation rates • Average daily labor costs • Average hourly labor costs	Monthly	Yes—The director of child nutrition prepares meal costs based on invoices and labor based on hourly wages instead of using financial reports generated from the district's financial system.	Yes

SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, March 2015; Controlling Cost in the Food Service Industry by Dorothy Pannell-Martin, 1998; DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

FIGURE 8–9
EXAMPLE OF CHILD NUTRITION FINANCIAL STATEMENT
SCHOOL YEAR 2012–13

FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICES DEPARTMENT
STATEMENT OF REVENUE, EXPENDITURES BY CAMPUS CAFETERIAS
NOVEMBER 30, 2012

	BUDGET	ACTIVITY TO DATE	OUTSTANDING ENCUMBRANCES	UNCOMMITED FUNDS	YEAR-TO-DATE PERCENTAGE
001 CENTRAL SENIOR					
Revenues					
5700 Local	$215,300	$85,421		$129,879	39.68
5800 State	4,700			4,700	
5900 Federal	685,000	232,132		452,868	33.89
Total Revenue	**905,000**	**317,554**		**587,446**	**35.09**
Expenditures					
6100 Payroll Costs	325,378	72,369		253,009	22.24
6200 Services	10,000			10,000	
6300 Supplies	523,000	100,033		422,967	19.13
6600 Capital Outlay	10,000			10,000	
Total Expenditures	**868,378**	**172,403**		**695,975**	**19.85**
Excess of Revenues Over Expenditures—Profit Loss	**$36,622**	**$145,151**		**($108,529)**	

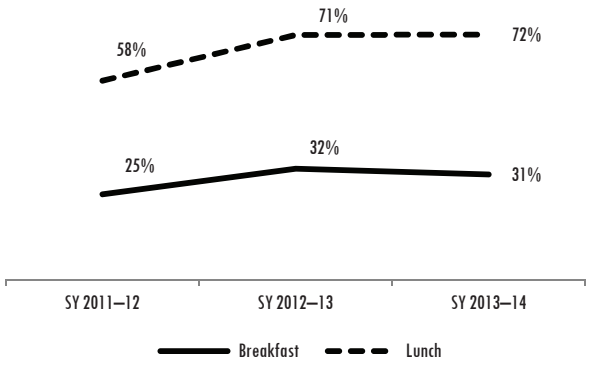
SOURCE: Beaumont ISD, January 2013.

program used by school districts to help ensure controlled food costs, eliminate food waste, and meet USDA regulations. However, despite these efforts, the meal participation rate remains low. **Figure 8–10** shows DeSoto ISD's breakfast and lunch participation rates for school years 2011–12 to 2013–14. From school years 2011–12 to 2012–13, the lunch participation rate increased 13 percent, and the breakfast participation rate increased 7 percent. Although the district implemented the universal school breakfast program in school year 2013–14, whereby all students can receive a free breakfast, the participation rate dropped by approximately 1 percent. That year, the district also changed breakfast serving times and the bell schedule to enable students to eat the free breakfast.

Figure 8–11 shows a comparison of DeSoto ISD's meal participation rates to those of its peers. Peer districts are districts similar to DeSoto ISD used for comparison purposes. DeSoto ISD's breakfast and lunch participation is the second lowest among its peers. DeSoto ISD and Temple ISD share the same percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals; however, DeSoto ISD's participation rates are lower in both areas. Both school districts offer free breakfast to all students through the Universal School Breakfast (USB) program, and neither district currently participates in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). The CEP allows high-poverty schools to offer both breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students while eliminating the traditional school meal application process. Temple ISD offers portable, a la carte breakfast items at all of its schools, which could account for the higher breakfast participation rate.

Some districts implement programs to increase meal participation rates. For example, Pflugerville ISD introduced a food truck at one of its high schools. The food truck is located outside the cafeteria near tables that are available for outside dining. The food truck serves tacos, made-to-order burritos, and bowl meals. The district uses a wireless POS system to track orders and sales. The food truck attracts more students to the cafeteria, resulting in a small increase in overall school lunch participation on the open campus. The district plans to use the vehicle for Pflugerville ISD's summer

FIGURE 8–10
DESOTO ISD BREAKFAST AND LUNCH PARTICIPATION RATES, SCHOOL YEARS 2011–12 TO 2013–14



SOURCE: Texas Department of Agriculture, National School Lunch Program District Profile, February 2015.

feeding program. All meals served through the food truck are USDA-approved reimbursable. During the first year of operation, the food truck served as many as 300 meals a day. Additionally, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools in Tennessee increased its breakfast participation by offering breakfast in the classroom at its elementary schools. The district reduced implementation costs when the milk supplier provided insulated coolers to deliver the breakfasts to each classroom. Teachers welcomed the program because it offered students the opportunity to receive a healthy meal at the start of the day.

DeSoto ISD should implement innovative district food service programs to increase students' meal participation. The district should strive to improve its breakfast participation rate by at least 10 percent, and improve its lunch participation rate by at least 8 percent. The district should consider programs such as breakfast in the classroom at elementary schools and portable, a la carte programs at the secondary levels. Additionally, the district should consider a food truck program to increase lunch participation. The director of child nutrition should coordinate with staff and principals to incorporate new meal programs in their respective campuses. The director of child nutrition and staff should promote the new programs through announcements, newsletters, posters, and the district's website.

The fiscal impact assumes a targeted 10 percent breakfast participation increase and an 8 percent lunch participation increase, which results in an annual gain of $15,129 and a five-year net gain of $75,645. **Figures 8–12, 8–13** and **8–14** show the fiscal impact based on these assumptions:

- additional number of meals served is based upon school year 2013–14 number of meals served in each category (381,324 free breakfasts and 1,118,464 total lunches);
- revenue received per meal is the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) reimbursement plus the student's price per meal served;
- increased revenue is the additional number of meals served multiplied by the revenue received per meal served; and
- expenditures are based on school year 2013–14 food and labor costs.

Figure 8–12 shows the fiscal impact from the USB recommendation.

Figure 8–13 shows the fiscal impact from the NSLP recommendation.

Figure 8–14 shows the total fiscal impact from both the USB and the NSLP.

FIGURE 8–11
DESOTO ISD MEAL PARTICIPATION RATES COMPARED TO PEER DISTRICTS SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14

SCHOOL DISTRICT	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE MEALS	BREAKFAST PARTICIPATION	LUNCH PARTICIPATION
DeSoto ISD	**74%**	**31%**	**72%**
Temple ISD	74%	39%	78%
Cedar Hill ISD	71%	42%	73%
Sharyland ISD	63%	28%	69%

SOURCE: Texas Department of Agriculture, National School Lunch Program District Profiles, school year 2013–14.

FIGURE 8–12
ESTIMATED INCREASE IN BREAKFAST PARTICIPATION
SCHOOL YEARS 2015–16 TO 2019–20

USB PERCENTAGE INCREASE	SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14 USB MEALS	ADDITIONAL USB MEALS	REIMBURSEMENT PER MEAL	INCREASED REVENUE
Free meals: 10% increase	381,324	38,132	$1.93	$73,596

NOTES:
(1) This fiscal impact assumes the district is receiving the severe need federal reimbursement.
(2) Additional number of Universal School Breakfast program meals is based on the number of meals served during school year 2013–14 and increasing by 10 percent during the next five years.
SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, March 2015.

FIGURE 8–13
ESTIMATED INCREASE IN SCHOOL LUNCH PARTICIPATION
SCHOOL YEARS 2015–16 TO 2019–20

NSLP PERCENTAGE INCREASE	SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14 NSLP MEALS	ADDITIONAL NSLP MEALS	REIMBURSEMENT PER MEAL (1)	STUDENT PRICE PER MEAL	ISD REVENUE PER MEAL	INCREASED REVENUE
Free meals: 8% increase	816,169	65,294	$3.21	$0.00	$3.21	$209,594
Reduced-price meals: 8% increase	110,282	8,823	$2.81	$0.40	$3.21	$28,322
Paid meals: 8% increase	192,013	15,361	$0.42	$2.75	$3.17	$48,694
Total	**1,118,464**	**89,478**				**$286,610**

NOTES:
(1) This fiscal impact assumes the district receives the maximum reimbursement rate per meal plus an additional $0.06.
(2) Totals may not sum due to rounding.
SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, March 2015; U.S. Department of Agriculture reimbursement rates, 2014.

FIGURE 8-14
TOTAL FISCAL IMPACT OF RECOMMENDATION

FISCAL YEARS	USB (1)	FREE NSLP MEALS (1)	REDUCED-PRICE NSLP MEALS (1)	PAID NSLP MEALS (1)	REVENUE	FOOD COST (45%)	LABOR COST (34%)	INCREASED REVENUE
2015–16	$14,719	$41,919	$5,664	$9,739	**$72,041**	$32,418	$24,494	**$15,129**
2016–17	$14,719	$41,919	$5,664	$9,739	**$72,041**	$32,418	$24,494	**$15,129**
2017–18	$14,719	$41,919	$5,664	$9,739	**$72,041**	$32,418	$24,494	**$15,129**
2018–19	$14,719	$41,919	$5,664	$9,739	**$72,041**	$32,418	$24,494	**$15,129**
2019–20	$14,719	$41,919	$5,664	$9,739	**$72,041**	$32,418	$24,494	**$15,129**
Net Increased Revenues for Five Years								**$75,645**

NOTES:
(1) The Universal School Breakfast and the National School Lunch Program increased revenue as shown in Figures 8-12 and 8-13 were divided throughout the five-year period.
(2) Totals may not sum due to rounding.
SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, March 2015.

FISCAL IMPACT

Some of the recommendations provided in this report are based on state or federal laws, rules, or regulations, and should be promptly addressed. Other recommendations are based on comparisons to state or industry standards, or accepted best practices, and should be reviewed to determine the level of priority, appropriate timeline, and method of implementation.

RECOMMENDATION	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	TOTAL 5-YEAR (COSTS) OR SAVINGS	ONE-TIME (COSTS) OR SAVINGS
CHAPTER 8. CHILD NUTRITION							
44. Develop and implement a districtwide child nutrition strategic plan.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
45. Develop detailed financial reports generated from the district's information system, and include comparative analysis in financial and management reports to guide the director of child nutrition in daily operations and planning.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
46. Implement innovative district food service programs to increase students' meal participation.	$15,129	$15,129	$15,129	$15,129	$15,129	$75,645	$0
TOTAL	**$15,129**	**$15,129**	**$15,129**	**$15,129**	**$15,129**	**$75,645**	**$0**

CHAPTER 9. TRANSPORTATION

An independent school district's transportation function transports students to and from school and other school-related activities. Federal and Texas state laws regulate functions related to funding, vehicle type, driver education, and safety issues. Districts implement these regulations, budget and allocate resources, and establish operational procedures for bell schedules, bus routes, and transportation fleet maintenance.

Managing transportation operations is dependent on the organizational structure of the district. Districts may either contract for or self-manage their transportation departments. Using a contracted management model, a district relies on the company to provide supervision of its transportation department. In this arrangement, a district may rely on the company to provide all or some staff, or may use district staff for its operations. Using the self-management model, a district operates its transportation department without assistance from an outside entity. Managing transportation operations requires planning; state reporting and funding; training and safety; and vehicle maintenance and procurement. Primary transportation expenditures include capital investments in vehicle fleets, and annual costs of maintenance and operations. State transportation funding relies on a district's annual submission of certain transportation reports to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), which is determined by a formula that includes the number and type of students transported.

DeSoto Independent School District (ISD) is located in Dallas County in the city of DeSoto. A small portion of DeSoto's city boundaries is located in Duncanville and Dallas ISDs. DeSoto ISD provides transportation services for 12 campuses (seven elementary schools, three middle schools, a freshman campus, and a high school) in a relatively dense area of 23 square miles. The district serves students located in the cities of DeSoto, Glenn Heights, and Ovilla.

During school year 2013–14, DeSoto ISD provided home-to-school transportation, also referred to as route services, to approximately 32 percent of the 9,399 total student population. The TEA School Transportation Allotment Handbook defines four types of route services transportation that are eligible for transportation allotment. These route services are regular, special, career and technical education (CATE), and private program. Regular route services are transportation of regular program students to school at the beginning of the school day and from school at the end of the school day. Regular route services also include transportation of regular program students during the school day to attend required academic courses that are not offered at the students' campus of attendance. Special program route services are transportation of special program students to school at the beginning of the school day and from school at the end of the school day. Career and technical education program route services are transportation of regular or special program students during the school day to attend a TEA-approved CATE course that is not available at the students' campus of attendance. Private program route services are transportation to school at the beginning of the school day and from school at the end of the school day by privately owned or commercial transportation for regular and special program students.

DeSoto ISD contracts with Dallas County Schools (DCS) through an interlocal agreement to provide student transportation services. DCS is a county transportation system taxing authority that provides transportation services to 11 school districts in the region, including DeSoto ISD. The DCS transportation department consists of 2,000 employees with a fleet of more than 1,900 buses housed at 12 service centers. DCS's Pat Raney Service Center maintains buses for Cedar Hill, Dallas, DeSoto, and Lancaster ISDs. Based on information provided by DCS, Pat Raney Service Center has a dedicated fleet of 55 buses for DeSoto ISD, six of which the district owns, which operated 41 regular program routes and 14 special education routes for school year 2013–14. The regular program routes included 87 morning and afternoon runs, one hazard run, and four midday career and technical runs for DeSoto ISD.

The DCS funding formula uses several components to calculate the district's yearly operational cost for route transportation services. Section A of the unexecuted interlocal agreement describes the calculation of the operational cost in DCS Part (6)(d) Invoices and Funding:

- the district annual operations expense is made up of all operational expenses associated with providing transportation service solely to the district;

- the DCS contribution of taxes to the district is allocated per mile; and
- the total yearly operational cost for route transportation services is calculated as follows:
- total operations expenses for the district less DCS's tax contribution attributed to the district program and TEA transportation reimbursement funds; any remaining balance is the total cost that the district owes DCS for route transportation service that year; and
- the TEA Transportation reimbursement funds are the amount reimbursed by TEA for transportation provided to district students.

Figure 9–1 shows DCS projected 2014–15 transportation expenses for DeSoto ISD.

FIGURE 9–1
DALLAS COUNTY SCHOOLS, DESOTO ISD TRANSPORTATION COST PROJECTIONS SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

BUDGET ITEM	AMOUNT
Total Salaries	$1,870,319
Total Contracted Services	$196,374
Total Supplies	$397,129
Total Miscellaneous Expenses	$126,090
Total Capital Expenses	$43,374
Total Expenses	$2,633,286
State Revenue	($702,011)
DCS Contribution	($275,455)
Total Budget Projection	**$1,655,820**

SOURCE: Dallas County Schools Transportation, February 2015.

School district bus schedules are coordinated to the school start times. A tier system is when school districts stagger their start times to allow a single bus to serve more than one school level at a time, thereby increasing transportation efficiency. By coordinating the start times, a single bus could run three separate routes—one each for the elementary, middle, and high schools to which it delivers students—instead of having three buses run one route each. DeSoto ISD operates on a two-tier bell time system in the morning and a three-tier system in the afternoon. The morning bell time has a 30-minute separation, with the freshman campus and high school starting on the early tier and the later tier for elementary and middle schools. The afternoon three-tier bell structure has separation intervals of 21 minutes between the freshman and high school campus and the elementary schools; the separation between elementary and middle schools is 30 minutes.

Figure 9–2 shows DeSoto ISD's average daily student ridership, by service category, for school years 2011–12 to 2013–14. DeSoto ISD had no private program route services during this time.

DCS submits one School Transportation Route Services Report and Student Transportation Operation Report to TEA including all the participating school districts in the county transportation system for the annual transportation allotment. DCS allocates the TEA allotments and tax allocations to DeSoto ISD to reduce operation expenses in the transportation budget.

FIGURE 9–2
DESOTO ISD AVERAGE DAILY RIDERSHIP SCHOOL YEARS 2011–12 TO 2013–14

SCHOOL YEAR	REGULAR PROGRAM (TWO OR MORE MILES)	HAZARDOUS AREA SERVICE	SPECIAL PROGRAM	CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAM	TOTAL
2011–12	2,843	59	169	0	3,071
2012–13	2,851	58	144	0	3,053
2013–14	2,858	27	148	27	3,060

SOURCE: Dallas County Schools, Route Services Reports, school years 2011–12 to 2013–14.

FINDINGS

- DeSoto ISD does not have adequate oversight of the outsourced and district-managed transportation operations.
- Desoto ISD lacks adequate controls to effectively manage the transportation services interlocal agreement.
- DeSoto ISD does not maintain a driver training and safety program for the district-owned and -operated activity fleet and therefore is not in compliance with board policies and the Texas Administrative Code.
- Desoto ISD does not have a comprehensive preventive maintenance program for the district-owned and -operated activity fleet.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 47: Centralize transportation functions within the supervision of the DeSoto ISD chief financial officer to ensure contract compliance with interlocal agreements, efficient service delivery, and coordination and maintenance of the district's transportation operations.**
- **Recommendation 48: Designate specific staff to oversee administration functions for the interlocal agreement with the transportation provider, require all requests for extracurricular transportation services to be processed through the district's purchasing system, and establish a review process for transportation service invoices.**
- **Recommendation 49: Implement a formal driver safety and training program for the district-owned and -operated activity fleet to ensure that drivers safely transport students and staff to and from school-related extracurricular activities.**
- **Recommendation 50: Draft and implement a preventive maintenance program for the district fleet to reduce vehicles' out-of-service time and increase vehicles' useful lives.**

DETAILED FINDINGS

TRANSPORTATION OVERSIGHT (REC. 47)

DeSoto ISD does not have adequate oversight of the outsourced and district-managed transportation operations.

Transportation services responsibilities are spread across several departments. Organizationally, the transportation function is supervised by the assistant superintendent for student support services, school improvement, and middle schools. The facilities and transportation specialist (specialist) is the primary coordinator, with half of that position's time dedicated to transportation functions. The specialist reports to the assistant superintendent for student support services, school improvement, and middle schools. The district does not have a dedicated transportation department.

Functionally, several district staff share the responsibility for student transportation oversight for the interlocal agreement services, financial oversight, district fleet coordination, and maintenance. Each staff that has a role in student transportation works in a different department and has other primary responsibilities.

Figure 9–3 shows the district's transportation services organizational responsibilities and associated positions.

In addition to transportation, the assistant superintendent is responsible for middle schools, student services, health services, fine arts, registration and zoning, adult education, and Board of Trustees policy and elections. The assistant superintendent also coordinates and evaluates the student composition of the DeSoto ISD's campus boundaries to address rezoning issues.

Most of the daily coordination between the student transportation provider and the district is assigned to the specialist, a clerical-level position. The assistant superintendent works with the specialist to establish bus stops based on the rezoned boundaries. The specialist devotes half of the position's work time to coordinating district facility rentals and the other half to responding to student transportation incident reports, accident reports, and questions regarding bus stop information. Student transportation oversight responsibility has shifted among various departments in the district from reorganizations due to approximately five changes in administration in the past 10 years. The transportation function was previously under the supervision of the DeSoto ISD chief financial officer (CFO). At the time of the onsite review, it had been approximately one year since the assistant superintendent was assigned to oversee this function. The DeSoto ISD CFO retained the financial oversight responsibility for contracted route transportation services and develops annual budgets based on forecasted bus service costs for the school year, in accordance with the interlocal agreement.

FIGURE 9–3
DESOTO ISD STUDENT TRANSPORTATION STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

STAFF	DUTIES
Chief Financial Officer	• Provide financial oversight • Develop annual budget in conjunction with transportation provider's projected costs • Meet with transportation CFO to review actual transportation costs
Assistant Superintendent for Student Support Services, School Improvement, and Middle Schools	• Establish bus stops based on rezoned boundaries • Coordinate bus routes with transportation provider • Handle parent and community complaints regarding designated bus stops • Address student disciplinary issues
Facilities and Transportation Specialist	• Assist with establishing bus stops based on rezoned boundaries • Assist in coordinating bus routes with transportation provider • Handle parent and community complaints regarding designated bus stops • Assist in addressing student disciplinary issues • Assist campuses with reserving field trips
Athletic Director	• Manage scheduling and maintenance of the DeSoto ISD activity buses • Manage district vehicle coordination and maintenance

SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, February 2015; DeSoto ISD, job descriptions and staff interviews, February 2015.

As a result of decentralized responsibilities, the oversight of student transportation operations is inadequate in the areas of route planning, maintenance, and contract management. Examples of weaknesses include:

- the interlocal agreement for transportation services expired on July 31, 2014, and the renewal process was not complete as of February 2015, the time of the onsite review;
- the district is not involved in the route path planning process;
- the absence of a district activity fleet preventive maintenance program; and
- a transportation representative from the district does not approve invoices for contracted extracurricular services before payment.

DCS also provides extracurricular transportation services to DeSoto ISD as part of the interlocal agreement. DeSoto ISD campuses can schedule transportation to extracurricular activities directly through the DCS scheduling system. The district allocates field trip costs to the requesting district department based on the account codes included on the invoices generated by the bus scheduling system DCS uses. The specialist assists DeSoto ISD campuses and staff with scheduling trips with DCS when requested. However, the scheduling system does not interface with the district's purchasing and finance system. The lack of interface and the lack of a purchase order process result in inadequate controls regarding the requisition and payment process for these activities. The funds are not designated before the commitment is made; therefore, without proper oversight, extracurricular activities could result in over-allocated budgets.

Outsourcing school bus transportation is a common industry practice and could be financially beneficial when properly implemented and managed. Bastrop ISD, a peer district, outsources its student transportation services. Peer districts are Texas school districts similar to DeSoto ISD that are used for comparison purposes. The Bastrop ISD chief operations officer (COO) has oversight responsibility for transportation, maintenance, facility usage, emergency management, and child nutrition. The transportation oversight includes contract compliance, financial management, and district fleet coordination and maintenance. The Bastrop ISD COO has an active role in monitoring route recommendations and design, focusing on bus route efficiencies and safe bus route development. By setting budget objectives and implementing cost controls to maximize bus route efficiency, Bastrop ISD achieved relatively low cost per student and per bus ratings, despite covering approximately 10,000 miles per day in its 450-square-mile rural district.

DeSoto ISD should centralize transportation functions within the supervision of the DeSoto ISD CFO to ensure contract compliance with interlocal agreements, efficient

service delivery, and coordination and maintenance of the district's transportation operations. (See the District Organization, Leadership, and Management chapter for a recommended reorganization that affects this recommendation). The DeSoto ISD Plant Services, Purchasing, and Financial Services are within the supervision of the CFO. Similar to the Bastrop ISD's COO, several functions could be supervised by the DeSoto ISD CFO to include transportation contract compliance, financial oversight, and district fleet coordination and maintenance.

Assigning management of transportation oversight with clearly defined responsibilities for agreement renewal options, route path planning, maintenance, and vendor performance results in a coordinated and efficient transportation system. Improvement in communication, documentation, and verification of service between DeSoto ISD and DCS would also help DeSoto ISD in meeting budgeted projections and reducing potential overages in transportation costs.

The superintendent should designate the CFO as the principal oversight position for all transportation functions and implement the transportation function realignment and consolidation effective for school year 2015–16. The district should also draft policies and procedures to include specific areas of responsibility for a centralized transportation function. The facilities and transportation specialist position should be moved and assigned to report to the CFO.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

CONTRACT MANAGEMENT (REC. 48)

DeSoto ISD lacks adequate controls to effectively manage the transportation services interlocal agreement.

The assistant superintendent for support services, school improvement, and middle schools is identified as the contact for official notices in the August 1, 2008, interlocal agreement between DeSoto ISD and DCS. However, the district has not identified one position that coordinates the transportation function. The interlocal agreement expired on July 31, 2014, five months before the onsite review. Although the district provided an unexecuted agreement with a term from August 1, 2012, to July 31, 2015, as of the onsite review, both parties had not signed and finalized the agreement. The assistant superintendent stated that she believed that the contract was up-to-date. However, the review team was not able to determine if the district monitors the contract or who is responsible for initiating the renewal of the interlocal agreement.

The interlocal agreement outlines the invoicing process for DCS and the district. DCS invoices the district for student transportation services on the first of each month, September to June, for the total budgeted net operating expense evenly divided throughout 10 months. The DeSoto ISD CFO and the DCS CFO meet annually to determine the anticipated budget for student transportation services. The DeSoto ISD CFO also meets with the DCS CFO approximately twice annually to review invoices and make billing adjustments based on actual costs. The DCS CFO bases the cost projections on annual mileage from the previous school year. The school year 2012–13 School Transportation Route Services Report for DeSoto ISD's regular program showed DCS traveled 362,844 miles. The school year 2013–14 report showed 437,061 regular program miles driven by DCS, which contributed to the adjustments in school year 2013–14.

Figure 9–4 shows the invoices for school year 2013–14 and adjustment made for route transportation services based on year-end actual mileage costs verses projections (excluding extracurricular activities). The May 1, 2014, and June 1, 2014, adjustments account for a total of $153,948 more than the prior months' invoices.

FIGURE 9–4
DALLAS COUNTY SCHOOLS INVOICES TO DESOTO ISD SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14

INVOICE DATE	AMOUNT
9/3/2013	$125,214
10/1/2013	$125,214
11/1/2013	$125,214
12/1/2013	$125,214
1/1/2014	$125,214
2/1/2014	$125,214
3/1/2014	$125,214
4/1/2014	$125,214
5/1/2014 (1)	$224,429
6/1/2014 (1)	$179,947
Total	**$1,406,088**

NOTE: (1) Actual adjustments amount shown for May 2014 and June 2014 due to an increase in the number of miles driven more than the original estimate.
SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Financial Services Accounts Payable Department, February 2015.

The interlocal agreement requires DCS to generate a separate invoice monthly for bus monitors at the agreed-upon hourly rate for the duration of the route. According to the agreement, DCS shall provide staff to perform the functions of a bus monitor on a route, if requested by DeSoto ISD, upon 48 hours' advance notice. An approved DeSoto ISD employee may perform the function of a bus monitor for a special education route. Approved district staff submit invoices for extracurricular activities, special programs, summer school, and special events.

The DeSoto ISD interlocal agreement with DCS provides the district reasonable access to all DCS's financial records related to the transportation services provided specifically to the district. The agreement also enables the district to review all financial records necessary to determine and verify annual operational cost for the district. However, although DeSoto ISD and DCS meet to discuss the transportation costs and budget, the district has not requested detailed cost reports regarding district direct and allocated service center services.

DeSoto ISD has not designated a transportation representative to be involved in the accounts payable process for approval of invoices before payment. DeSoto ISD's Financial Services Department pays invoices from DCS for extracurricular transportation services without validation of service performance from the requesting department or campus. Some departments and campuses make check requests to the department for transportation services performed, in lieu of following the district's purchase order process or using DCS's reservation system. Furthermore, the director of purchasing is not involved in the pending renewal of the interlocal agreement with DCS, nor is the director of purchasing involved in an interlocal agreement with the city of DeSoto to provide fuel for district vehicles and police officers for school security.

A district that has effective transportation management practices performs a detailed annual analysis of route path and mileage data to validate that the district designs the most efficient routes. DeSoto ISD does not have a process to analyze these data to ensure that the transportation service provider charts the most efficient routes and that the district is not overcharged based on higher mileage costs. The DCS budget projections for cost of direct and allocated service center services are affected based on mileage driven for DeSoto ISD route transportation services. **Figure 9–5** shows that DeSoto ISD has a higher operation cost per mile than three of its peers.

Without appropriate controls in place, the district risks paying for transportation services not performed. The district is also at risk of spending more than the allocated transportation budget. Effective districts regularly review detailed financial records as a control against being overcharged for district-specific and allocated costs for outsourced transportation services.

Many businesses and organizations establish controls to monitor contracts so that payment is not made on unauthorized goods and services. To control cash flow, organizations have procedures in place to establish a payment-requisition system that allows an authorized representative to approve requests to pay vendors. A payment requisition is a request from a department for permission to pay a bill. The bill is only paid when an authorized representative signs the payment requisition, giving the organization control of expenditures each month.

DeSoto ISD should designate specific staff to oversee administration functions for the interlocal agreement with the transportation provider, require all requests for extracurricular transportation services to be processed through the district's purchasing system, and establish a

FIGURE 9–5
DESOTO ISD AND PEER DISTRICT REGULAR PROGRAM OPERATION COST PER MILE
SCHOOL YEAR 2013–14

DISTRICT	COSTS	TOTAL MILEAGE	COST PER MILE
Cedar Hill ISD	$4,502,146	913,374	$4.93
DeSoto ISD	**$3,140,863**	**437,061**	**$4.93**
Temple ISD	$2,458,500	587,269	$4.19
Sharyland ISD	$2,954,270	972,922	$3.04
Bastrop ISD	$3,997,031	1,840,313	$2.17

SOURCES: Dallas County Schools Student Transportation Operation Report, school year 2013–14; Texas Education Agency Student Transportation Operation Reports, school year 2013–14.

review process for transportation service invoices. The oversight administrative function should designate staff to ensure that DCS and DeSoto ISD adhere to all provisions in the interlocal agreement. This staff should coordinate with the director of purchasing to ensure that the Purchasing Department has a copy of the agreement, renewal dates, and information regarding vendor performance.

The CFO should assign interlocal agreement management responsibilities to staff in the Purchasing Department. The CFO should also assign review of transportation invoices to the facilities and transportation specialist and implement a formal procurement and payment requisition process for transportation services. These actions should be implemented in school year 2015–16. The following are the implementation steps for procurement of transportation services and payment requisition process for extracurricular transportation requests:

- submit purchase request: the requesting school or department submits transportation purchase requests to the specialist through the district's purchasing requisition system;
- submit transportation services receiving report through the district's information system: the requesting school or department completes the online receiving report after the required transportation services have been received;
- review the invoice: require DCS to submit all transportation invoices directly to the specialist; the specialist should review invoices for regular transportation services to ensure the charges are in accordance with the terms of the interlocal agreement, and review and match the extracurricular invoices to the online receiving reports; if an invoice does not have an approved purchase request or a receiving report in the system, the specialist should provide the invoice to the CFO for appropriate action and facilitate resolution of any invoice discrepancy before payment of the invoice;
- provide the payment requisition to the Financial Services Department: the specialist should compile all transportation invoices and prepare a signed payment requisition for submission to the accounts payable staff;
- implement business processes to perform formal analysis of transportation routes and costs annually;
- request DCS to generate district-specific route services and operation reports annually for review; and
- the detailed financial records for transportation operations should be analyzed annually by the DeSoto ISD CFO or a designated representative.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

SAFETY AND TRAINING (REC. 49)

DeSoto ISD does not maintain a driver training and safety program for the district-owned and -operated activity fleet and therefore is not in compliance with board policies and the Texas Administrative Code.

DeSoto ISD owns and operates a small fleet of buses and coaches for extracurricular activities. This fleet is considered the activity fleet and is used primarily for athletic purposes; the drivers are predominantly the coaches of the athletic teams requesting transportation. The drivers who operate the DeSoto ISD activity buses for nonathletic purposes are usually DCS employees.

The district's athletic director, as opposed to the Human Resources Department, maintains a copy of the commercial driver licenses identifying the applicable endorsements for approximately eight district employees who are eligible to drive the activity fleet. Some of the DeSoto ISD activity fleet drivers are employees of both DeSoto ISD and DCS.

The district and drivers are required to meet specifications established by the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) and the Texas Administrative Code. DeSoto ISD's Board Policy DBA (LEGAL), regarding employment credentials and records, outlines policies for school bus driver credentials. The policy defines a school bus driver as a driver transporting students or staff on routes to and from school or on a school-related activity trip while operating a multifunction activity bus or school bus.

To be employed and maintain employment status as a school bus driver, a person must meet the following requirements:

- be at least 18 years old;
- possess a valid driver license designating a class appropriate for the gross vehicle weight rating with applicable endorsement;
- meet the medical qualification specified by DPS;

- maintain an acceptable driving record in accordance with the minimum standards established by DPS;
- maintain an acceptable criminal history record; and
- possess a valid Texas School Bus Driver Safety Training Certificate.

The district is required, according to Board Policy DBA (LEGAL), to perform an annual evaluation of the complete driving record of each school bus driver it employs. The inquiry must be made with DPS and any state in which the driver held a motor vehicle operator's license or permit during that period. The district must review the driving record to determine whether the bus driver meets the minimum requirements of the Texas Administrative Code, Title 37, Rule 14.14(d), which outlines penalty points for conviction of traffic law violations and crash involvements. Any person who has accumulated 10 or more traffic law violation penalty points is considered ineligible to transport students until such time as he or she may become qualified. Additionally, according to the Texas Administrative Code, Title 37, Rule 14.14(g), the district must not permit a disqualified driver to drive a school bus, activity bus, or multifunction activity bus.

DCS is required by the interlocal agreement to observe and comply with all applicable federal, state, and local statutes, ordinances, rules, and regulations. For example, DCS performs the criminal background checks and Texas Department of Transportation drug and alcohol testing for the school bus drivers.

DeSoto ISD activity bus drivers who are not also employees of DCS must be monitored to verify continued qualification for transportation of students to and from school-related activities and athletic events. The Athletic Department did not provide information regarding driver training and safety checks that was requested during the review.

Board Policy DHE (LEGAL), regarding employee conduct standards, includes provisions that DeSoto ISD shall conduct testing in safety-sensitive positions, in accordance with federal regulations, of commercial motor vehicle operators for use of alcohol or a controlled substance that violates law or the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, 49 CFR Part 382. Texas independent school districts are exempt from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSR) with the exception of Part 382, regarding controlled substance and alcohol use and testing. FMCSR 49 CFR Part 382 applies to every driver and to all employers of drivers who operate a commercial motor vehicle in commerce in any state, and is subject to commercial driver license requirements.

DeSoto ISD does not maintain sufficient documentation of driver records, annual evaluations, and training certifications for drivers of district-owned activity bus operations. As a result, the district is not in compliance with board policies and the Texas Administrative Code. Additionally, DeSoto ISD's failure to implement and maintain proper driver safety and training program records negatively affects the assurance of student transportation safety.

To ensure maximum safety and compliance with state requirements, effective districts implement detailed driver safety and training programs. DCS maintains a driver safety and training program for all bus drivers. Round Rock ISD's Transportation Department implements a model driver safety and training program. **Figure 9–6** shows the types of training provided for pre-employment, initial employment, and continued employment for DCS and Round Rock ISD.

DeSoto ISD should implement a formal driver safety and training program for the district-owned and -operated activity fleet to ensure that drivers safely transport students and staff to and from school-related extracurricular activities. DeSoto ISD should follow best practice standards, such as those DCS and Round Rock ISD have implemented. The Regional Education Service Center X (Region 10) provides school bus driver safety education training that includes school bus driver basics and Texas school bus driver recertification courses.

The Human Resource Department, instead of the athletic director, should maintain bus driver records to ensure the privacy of safety-sensitive employee records and alcohol and drug testing records.

The athletic director or a designated representative should contact the DeSoto ISD Human Resources Department for information regarding training consortiums and collaborative training opportunities for school bus drivers. DeSoto ISD should also contact DCS for collaborative onsite training. The school bus driver safety and training program information should be maintained in a separate personnel file for each driver. The personnel file should include the district's annual evaluation for acceptable school bus driver credentials and other information as directed by Board Policy DBA (LEGAL).

FIGURE 9–6
SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS SAFETY AND TRAINING BEST PRACTICES
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

DALLAS COUNTY SCHOOLS	ROUND ROCK ISD
Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) School Bus Driver Certification Course: 20 hours	Motor vehicle records check
Texas DPS School Bus Driver Recertification Course: 8 hours	Annual physical examination
General transportation safety class	Alcohol and drug testing
Special needs transportation	Behind-the-wheel training
National Safety Council's Defensive Driving Course	School Bus Driver Certification
American Red Cross' Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation training	National Safety Council's Defensive Driving Course
Behind-the-wheel training	Special needs training
Commercial driver license classes	Crisis Prevention Institute
Monthly safety meetings	Balridge Quality Management Techniques
	Radio usage class
	Safe school bus pedestrian crossing
	Pre-trip inspections
	Drug and alcohol awareness
	Required annual training
	Monthly safety training

SOURCES: Dallas County Schools; school year 2014–15 Round Rock ISD, February 2015.

This fiscal impact assumes the maintenance of a school bus driver safety and training program could be implemented with existing resources. The district may incur some training costs associated with external driver courses and should budget for those costs based on the individual needs of the DeSoto ISD school bus driver, but the costs are not assumed in the fiscal impact.

The fiscal impact associated with DeSoto ISD school bus driver training is based on the Region 10 online course for safety training recertification of $50 per driver, every three years; the district would spend $500 for 10 drivers every three years. Region 10 also offers bus safety training at the district location for $500 for up to 45 participants, and this training should be performed annually. Region 10 offers training in accident avoidance for bus drivers for no cost to districts. The fiscal impact would be $1,000 ($500 x 2 courses) in the first and fourth fiscal years, and $500 annually in the second, third, and fifth fiscal years.

School districts do not incur any cost associated with driver and criminal checks for school bus drivers through DPS.

PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE (REC. 50)

DeSoto ISD does not have a comprehensive preventive maintenance program for the district-owned and -operated activity fleet. The district's athletic director is responsible for management of the district's activity fleet; however, management activities focus on scheduling trips.

DeSoto ISD does not have fleet maintenance management software to track the maintenance of vehicle equipment, including repair and preventive maintenance work orders. The district does not routinely perform preventive maintenance bus inspections. DeSoto ISD's Athletic Department is the primary user of the activity fleet, but the fleet is available to all campuses and staff for conferences, extracurricular activities, and field trips. The athletic director coordinates availability of district activity fleet vehicles, maintenance of district vehicles through plant services and local vendors, and district activity bus driver coordination and safety. At the time of the onsite review, the Athletic Department was responsible for the three original DeSoto ISD activity buses, three of the newly acquired activity buses, and three eight-passenger sport utility vehicles (SUV).

The Athletic Department maintains an SUV/Bus Usage Report to track user mileage and assign account codes for the requesting department. Facilities staff and drivers monitor when service is required according to vendor reminder notices for returned service. External vendors maintain activity buses, and sport utility vehicles are maintained by district staff or outside vendors based on the service required. The DeSoto ISD director of purchasing mentioned during the onsite review that the district had not developed transportation procedures or a maintenance program or plan for its activity fleet. The district conducted a cost benefit analysis to determine cost savings for replacement of its activity bus fleet. The original activity fleet consisted of three, small, 24- to 36-passenger buses. Two of these district-owned buses are 1997 models, and one is a 1994 model. According to analysis of maintenance records, the three buses were not reliable for extended trips, and the district maintenance costs are above average due to the buses' advanced age and mileage.

The projected cost for the acquisition of three newly manufactured buses was $265,000, with a probable $92,500 in activity bus rental savings, based on the district retaining one of the lowest-mileage activity buses from the original fleet. With an activity bus fleet of four vehicles, the district estimated a return of investment in 2.9 years.

During school year 2013–14, the three district-owned buses made 349 trips and accumulated approximately 10,500 miles. The district estimated a revenue of $52,042 for calendar year 2013 by using the three district-owned activity buses instead of renting activity buses from DCS. At the time of the onsite review, the district planned to replace the two highest-mileage buses in its fleet with two newly manufactured 71-passenger buses and one 36-passenger bus.

DeSoto ISD purchased three school activity buses in September 2014 and placed them into use in October 2014. The $294,500 purchase included: a 36-passenger, front-engine bus; a 59-passenger, rear-engine bus; and a 72-passenger, rear-engine bus. The buses were part of a dealer buy-back from a previous district and were purchased by DeSoto ISD with no warranties. The district determined the price to be reasonable based on the age and mileage of the vehicles. The 72-passenger bus was already painted in DeSoto ISD's school colors. The additional two buses were white, and the district spent an additional $9,000 to have them wrapped in the school colors, bringing the total acquisition to approximately $303,500, 13 percent higher than the estimated cost.

The Athletic Department's staff lacks the technical expertise to effectively manage the district's transportation operations. This lack of expertise has resulted in the district not developing a comprehensive preventive maintenance program and an inability to ensure that the DeSoto ISD activity fleet is operating to optimal performance. The absence of a preventive maintenance program may have contributed to the recently acquired 72-passenger activity bus experiencing a mechanical failure during a field trip. The vehicle was being repaired at the time of the onsite review after being in service for five months from the date of purchase.

DCS uses fleet maintenance management software to track all functions related to the maintenance of vehicle equipment, including repair and preventive maintenance work orders; operating expenses including fuel, oil, and licensing; and billing for equipment use. DCS performs preventive maintenance bus inspections at 6,000-mile intervals. An 84-point inspection is performed to include a road test, body interior and exterior, engine compartment, under-vehicle front and rear axles, and tires.

The DCS management software generates electronic vehicle inspection reports for pre-trip and post-trip vehicle inspections. DCS maintenance personnel place radio frequency identification tags on the vehicles in critical inspection zones. The bus driver scans an inspection reading tool across the identification tag to assess the condition of the components within the zone. At the completion of the inspection process, the reading tool transmits the information to a secure database.

DeSoto ISD should draft and implement a preventive maintenance program for district fleet to reduce vehicles' out-of-service time and increase vehicles' useful lives. The manufacturer recommends oil changes at intervals of 3,000 miles for the SUV models that the district owns. Based on driving conditions, the oil life monitor system in the vehicle may extend oil change intervals past the 3,000-mile interval. The manufacturer for the newly acquired DeSoto ISD activity buses recommends service intervals between 12,000–15,000 miles, 1,500–2,000 gallons of fuel, or 450–500 hours of operation.

DeSoto ISD should first draft a preventive maintenance policy that complements the type of vehicles in its activity fleet. The district should designate a responsible party to implement the maintenance policy and should train drivers and applicable staff. Preventive maintenance inspection checklists should be developed based on those used by peer transportation departments or DCS. Pre-trip and post-trip bus inspections should be performed for every operating event for each vehicle and recorded manually or electronically into a database. Frequent monitoring of this process is essential to ensure that vehicles are operative and are extended to their anticipated useful lives. The district should communicate the maintenance plan to its vehicle repair company.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

FISCAL IMPACT

Some of the recommendations provided in this report are based on state or federal laws, rules or regulations, and should be promptly addressed. Other recommendations are based on comparisons to state or industry standards, or accepted best practices, and should be reviewed to determine the level of priority, appropriate timeline, and method of implementation.

RECOMMENDATION		2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	TOTAL 5-YEAR (COSTS) OR SAVINGS	ONE-TIME (COSTS) OR SAVINGS
CHAPTER 9. TRANSPORTATION								
47.	Centralize transportation functions within the supervision of the DeSoto ISD chief financial officer to ensure effective contract compliance with interlocal agreements, efficient service delivery, and coordination and maintenance of the district's transportation operations.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
48.	Designate specific staff to oversee administration functions for the interlocal agreement with the transportation provider, require all requests for extracurricular transportation services to be processed through the district's purchasing system, and establish a review process for transportation service invoices.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
49.	Implement a formal driver safety and training program for the district-owned and -operated activity fleet to ensure that drivers safely transport students and staff to and from school-related extracurricular activities.	($1,000)	($500)	($500)	($1,000)	($500)	($3,500)	$0
50.	Draft and implement a preventive maintenance program for the district fleet to reduce vehicles' out-of-service time and increase vehicles' useful lives.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
TOTAL		**($1,000)**	**($500)**	**($500)**	**($1,000)**	**($500)**	**($3,500)**	**$0**

CHAPTER 10. TECHNOLOGY

An independent school district's technology management affects the operational, instructional, and financial functions of a school district. Technology management requires planning and budgeting, inventory control, technical infrastructures, application support, and purchasing. Managing technology is dependent on a district's organizational structure. Larger districts typically have staff dedicated to administrative or instructional technology responsibilities, while smaller districts could have staff responsible for both functions.

Administrative technology includes systems that support a district's operational, instructional, and financial functions (e.g., financial management, human resources, payroll, student attendance, grades, and Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) reporting). Administrative technology improves a district's operational efficiency through faster processing, increased access to information, integrated systems, and communication networks. Instructional technology includes the use of technology as a part of the teaching and learning process (e.g., integration of technology in the classroom, virtual learning, and electronic instructional materials). Instructional technology supports curriculum delivery, classroom instruction, and student learning.

Texas state law requires school districts to prepare improvement plans that include the integration of technology with instructional and administrative programs. A plan defines goals, objectives, and actions for technology projects; assigns responsibility for implementation steps; and establishes deadlines. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) provides a tool for planning and assessing school technology and readiness, which identifies performance measures for teaching and learning, educator preparedness, administration, support services, and infrastructure.

DeSoto Independent School District's (ISD) technology vision is to empower twenty-first-century, student-centered learning through focused, purposeful technology immersion throughout the curriculum and the learning environment, and to enable all students to maximize their potential as lifelong learners and contributors. DeSoto ISD's Technology Department plays a key role in assisting the district to realize this vision by implementing and maintaining technology infrastructure. The Technology Department's responsibility includes deployment, maintenance, and support of the server environment (network, applications, and database), computers (desktops, laptops, and tablets), and networked printers. The Technology Department provides service and support to schools in the acquisition and use of technology throughout the district. The department assists students and teachers to access technology and information resources. The Technology Department works closely with the Curriculum Department to ensure that technology is integrated into the classroom environment to enhance student learning.

The director of technology services, who reports to the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools, leads DeSoto ISD's Technology Department. The supervisor of technology services, senior media manager, systems administrator, network analyst, computer technician, and administrative assistant report to the director. The director manages the information systems, computing infrastructure, and technology services for the district. His responsibilities include technology and information management, development of policies and procedures to govern technology activities, management of the district's technology budget, hardware and software acquisition and inventory control, and management of technical staff. The director ensures efficient and effective access to information and related technology for administrative departments and campuses. The supervisor of technology services is the point of contact for resolution of computer-related problems, providing phone support, and evaluation and distribution of technology-related work orders. The senior media manager is responsible for the design, implementation, and support of all district media resources, which include sound and video systems, videoconferencing, multimedia, digital signage, and the Internet Protocol (IP) address security system (cameras and card scanners). The systems administrator designs, programs, modifies, and implements computer systems and applications to manage and report information throughout the district. The network analyst implements and maintains the district's wide area network (WAN) and local area networks (LAN). This responsibility involves the installation, testing, and oversight of all network hardware, software, and related equipment. The computer technician reports to the supervisor of technology services, and performs onsite technical support by installing and maintaining computer

and network equipment and software applications throughout the district. The administrative assistant provides clerical support to the director and technical staff by preparing and maintaining departmental records, reports, and correspondence. To assist with first-level campus technology support, each campus designated a teacher or librarian to serve as Campus Information Technology Support (CITS).

The DeSoto ISD PEIMS specialist reports to the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools. The specialist coordinates the collection, integration, and formatting of all data required for submission to TEA according to PEIMS data standards. The specialist's responsibilities include editing and verifying data for accuracy, execution and distribution of various reports to appropriate staff, and collaborating and assisting campus attendance/PEIMS clerks.

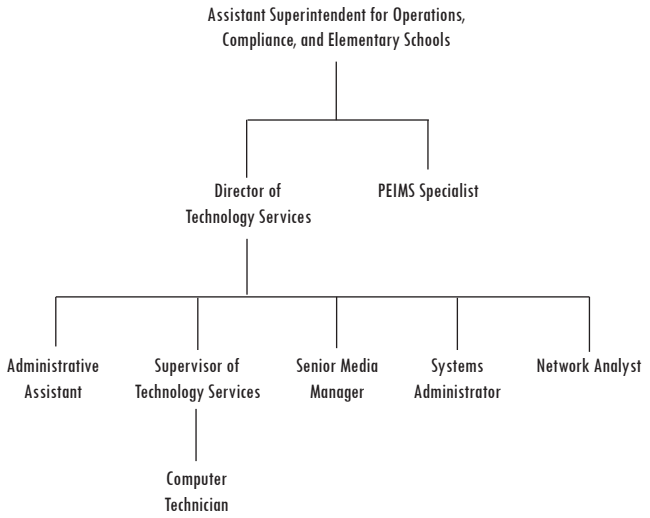
Figure 10–1 shows the DeSoto ISD Technology Department and PEIMS organization.

Figure 10–2 shows a summary of DeSoto ISD's Technology Department operational budget for school year 2014–15. The department's operational budget for school year 2014–15 is $2.0 million or $222 per student, based on the school year 2013–14 enrollment of 9,399 students.

DeSoto ISD's technology infrastructure is on a WAN that operates on a fiber-optic structure that provides a one-gigabit connection to all district locations. All campuses have limited wireless connectivity that provides flexible access to the Internet. All district locations have a LAN to provide connectivity for local hardware devices. The networking infrastructure consists of 50 servers running Microsoft Windows 2003 or 2008 advanced operating systems. The district installed several system software applications to provide such services as database management, email, antivirus, security, and content filtering. **Figure 10–3** shows a listing of the installed system software applications.

In school year 2013–14, DeSoto ISD implemented the Prologic Total Education Administrative Management Solution (TEAMS) Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) System and Student Information System (SIS) as its financial and student data management system. TEAMS ERP and SIS is a web-based, single, shared-database, integrated system that seamlessly handles operational and student data transactions. Through this system's integrated modules, all transactions for accounts payable and receivable, cash management, payroll, purchasing, human resources, and student information take place in a single system. Prologic supports and hosts DeSoto ISD's TEAMS ERP and SIS system.

FIGURE 10–1
DESOTO ISD TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT AND PUBLIC EDUCATION INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (PEIMS) ORGANIZATION
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15



SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

FIGURE 10–2
DESOTO ISD TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT OPERATIONAL BUDGET
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

CATEGORY	AMOUNT
Staff Salary and Benefits	$573,095
Professional Services	280,200
Supplies and Equipment	78,845
Licensing	60,000
Travel	4,000
Capital Lease	1,086,000
Total Budget	$2,082,140
Total Students	9,399
Average per Student	$222

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

FIGURE 10–3
DESOTO ISD SYSTEM SOFTWARE APPLICATIONS
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

APPLICATION	PURPOSE
Symantec Altiris	Software Deployment and Imaging
DBVisualizer	Database Management
Microsoft Exchange 2007	Mail Server
Google Console	Chromebooks Laptop Management
LightSpeed Rocket	Content Filtering
Microsoft Office 2010	Microsoft Office Applications
S2 NetBox	Security and Badge System
Microsoft SCCM Configuration Manager	Imaging-based Deployment
Solarwinds NPM	Network Performance Monitoring
Symantec Backup Exec 2010	Backup Software
Trend Micro	Antivirus Software
Microsoft Windows 7	Operating System

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

Teachers throughout the district use presentation stations, interactive projectors, and interactive whiteboards when presenting lessons. The district has invested in many computer applications to enhance the teaching experience. **Figure 10–4** shows the available instructional applications.

DeSoto ISD is working toward meeting the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) 2006–2020 Long-Range Plan for Technology (LRPT) recommendation of a student-to-computer ratio of 1:1 by 2020. For school year 2014–15, the district has 8,525 computers accessible to 9,399 students, resulting in an overall student-to-computer ratio of 1.08:1.

FIGURE 10–4
DESOTO ISD INSTRUCTIONAL APPLICATIONS AND TARGETED USERS
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

APPLICATION	USERS
Achieve 3000	Grades nine to 12
BrainPOP Jr.	Kindergarten to grade three
BrainPOP	Grades four to eight
Career Cruising Engage	Grades six to 12
Career Cruising Method Test Prep	Grades 10 to 12
Career Cruising Springboard	Grades six to eight
Edmentum: Study Island	Grades 10 to 12 (dropout recovery)
Edmentum: Plato	Grades nine to 12 (credit recovery)
Eduphoria	Staff
Encyclopaedia Britannica	Kindergarten to grade 12
Follett Library Resources	Kindergarten to grade 12
Imagine Learning	Kindergarten to grade 5 (Bilingual, English as a Second Language, Special Education)
Istation	Preschool to grade eight
Penda Learning	Grades four to nine
Reasoning Mind	Kindergarten to grade 5
Discovery Education Streaming and Discovery Science, through Region 10 Education Service Center	Preschool to grade 12
EBSCO Information Services, through Region 20 Education Service Center	Grades six to 12
Renaissance Learning: Accelerated Reader 360	Grades one to eight
Renaissance Learning: STAR Math	Grades one to eight
Surescore Campus2Careers	Grades 10 to 12
TEKS Resource System	Kindergarten to grade 12 (math, science)
Think Through Math	Grades three to eight
Vantage Learning My Access!	Grades six to 12

NOTE: TEKS=Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills.
SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, February 2015.

The district allocated $315,000 of federally established Qualified Zone Academy Bond (QZAB) funds for classroom infrastructure upgrades and acquisition of computers, interactive projectors, touch-screen computer tables, and three-dimensional printers to establish a state-of-the-art learning environment for its students. The QZAB bonds are specifically for renovations, technology equipment, energy efficiency, and teacher training. These bonds are available from the state at a nominal interest rate. The district received $9.5 million from an approved QZAB bond during school year 2013–14, and the district has three years remaining to spend these funds. As of February 2015, the district expended $2.0 million of the total funds.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- DeSoto ISD is effectively using a four-year leasing program to replace and standardize its aging and outdated computers.
- DeSoto ISD installed a technologically advanced, television broadcast studio to provide students real-life experience in planning, producing, directing, and filming live productions.

FINDINGS

- DeSoto ISD's Technology Department lacks a method to determine the appropriate staff and an organizational structure to provide the most efficient and effective technology support.
- DeSoto ISD's Technology Department lacks a process to monitor and assess the effectiveness of support.
- DeSoto ISD's Technology Department staff lacks adequate professional development and training to support all the technology used in the district.
- DeSoto ISD lacks cross-trained technical positions to perform critical tasks to support the district's financial system reporting and PEIMS data submission.
- DeSoto ISD lacks an up-to-date, long-range technology plan that incorporates the District Improvement Plan and Campus Improvement Plans.
- DeSoto ISD lacks documented procedures to govern and provide guidelines to handle technology-related operational and support activities.
- DeSoto ISD lacks an effective process for maintaining district network operations during a disaster or outage.
- DeSoto ISD does not effectively use all of the modules in the district's financial and student operations system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 51: Establish a methodology using an appropriate formula to determine the proper staffing level, set up a helpdesk function, and reorganize the district's Technology Department structure around key functional support areas.**
- **Recommendation 52: Develop key performance indicators with targets to measure the effectiveness of district technology support, including maximizing the capabilities of the helpdesk system and using it to track and monitor performance against the indicator targets.**
- **Recommendation 53: Assess technology staff skill sets against the district's support needs and develop professional development and training plans to address deficiencies.**
- **Recommendation 54: Implement a process to designate and cross-train staff for the systems administrator and PEIMS support functions for the district.**
- **Recommendation 55: Evaluate the district's technology needs and develop a three-year, long-range technology plan that considers the district's District Improvement Plan and Campus Improvement Plans.**
- **Recommendation 56: Develop written procedures to govern and provide guidelines for handling district technology support activities.**
- **Recommendation 57: Develop and install a redundant network infrastructure and establish a backup data center facility to use in the event a disaster renders the district's data center inoperable.**
- **Recommendation 58: Assess how to use the district's financial and student systems to provide the required functionality and train the appropriate users on how to use the system.**

DETAILED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

COMPUTER LEASING PROGRAM

DeSoto ISD is effectively using a four-year leasing program to replace and standardize its aging and outdated computers. In school year 2011–12, DeSoto ISD had fewer than 20 computers less than 10 years old. In addition, no computers were in the elementary classrooms. To address this situation in a systematic and cost-effective manner, in school year 2013–14, the district leadership engaged in a four-year leasing program to replace the aging computers and install computers where none previously had been placed. A primary goal of the leasing program was to have at least a 3:1 student-to-computer ratio in every classroom. Upon the arrival of the leased computers, the district established a phased replacement plan to install computers in the high school first, the middle schools second, the elementary schools third, and the administrative staff offices fourth.

The leasing program allows the district to standardize its computing platform and desktop image. This standardization reduces support requirements and ultimately results in lower maintenance cost.

TELEVISION BROADCAST STUDIO

DeSoto ISD installed a technologically advanced, television broadcast studio to provide students real-life experience in planning, producing, directing, and filming live productions. In school year 2011–12, DeSoto ISD broke ground on the grades nine to 12 expansion, adding more than 165,000 square feet of classroom and practical learning areas to the campus. That expansion added the necessary space to establish and house the DeSoto High School College and Career Academies. These academies are unique in that all students have the opportunity to earn college credit and explore potential careers without losing the traditional high school experiences and extracurricular opportunities.

As part of the academies, the district installed the television studio. The studio is equipped with an operational control unit, multiple cameras, and a staged interview set with a green-screen background. The cost for equipment and installation was $1.3 million. The equipment's life span is about five to 10 years, depending on its purpose and use. The district requires the program's teachers to receive training in video and multimedia.

Students use the studio to tape the video announcements displayed each morning on the monitors located throughout the high school. Students who have the opportunity to participate in the career and technical education audio/visual broadcast production program acquire knowledge and job skills. To complement their classroom learning, the students can interact with local television station employees who volunteer with the program.

Through this program, the district is developing an environment and opportunities for students to prepare for their careers.

DETAILED FINDINGS

ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE AND STAFFING (REC. 51)

DeSoto ISD's Technology Department lacks a method to determine the appropriate staff and an organizational structure to provide the most efficient and effective technology support.

The Technology Department has five staff that provide support for all students and staff. These staff provides a high level of support in their areas of expertise. However, each technology staff must be available to meet the district's high demand for routine, daily, helpdesk support. The technology staff needs to handle each helpdesk ticket to the best of their availability, regardless of their functional areas of expertise. The district staff uses the Eduphoria HelpDesk system to enter and track technical work order requests. The district's administration lacks documentation or knowledge of the methodology previously used to determine the technology staffing needs. Additionally, the previous administration eliminated the technology staff and the dedicated telephone number that supported the helpdesk function. Throughout the day, each technical staff checks the helpdesk system to choose a task that needs support.

To supplement the Technology Department's support effort, each campus has full-time teachers or librarians who serve as campus information technology support (CITS). CITS multitask to address minor technical issues and do some technical troubleshooting, but they cannot perform major technical tasks such as retrieving files from the backup, reconfiguring printers, or setting up new users' accounts. As a result, the CITS enters all major task needs in the Eduphoria HelpDesk system, and the technical staff is responsible for these tasks.

As the district continues to add new computers and other technology tools, and embrace such initiatives as Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), requirements for support have increased. The BYOD program began in the 2012–13 school

year and authorizes students and teachers to bring their own technology devices to use at specified times during the school day. With classroom teacher approval, students may use their devices in the classroom to participate in instructional activities, access and save information from the Internet, collaborate with other students, and utilize productivity tools and instructionally appropriate applications. A variety of devices is allowed such as laptops, notebooks, tablet computers, digital publication readers, MP3 players, and smart phones. With the addition of these devices, the need for technology staff support has increased, and the district's administration has not established an appropriate staffing methodology to meet the technical support demands. The department's organizational structure does not allow the technical staff to categorize and support the district's technology needs by functions such as network, media and presentation, applications, and computer services. Without categorizing the technology needs by function, the technology staff experienced in that specific function cannot quickly repair the technical issue and repeat subsequent repairs by using a comprehensive approach.

Figure 10–5 shows that DeSoto ISD has a higher number of computers per technology staff and students per technology staff than any of its peer districts. Peer districts are districts similar to DeSoto ISD used for comparison purposes. At the district's staffing level, the technical support staff cannot effectively meet the districts' increasing technology needs. This comparison does not take into consideration all the other technical devices that could require technical staff support, such as interactive projectors and network printers.

The district has an inefficient method to handle support calls and manage the helpdesk system. The district has expert technology staff handling simple technical tasks, such as rebooting computers, resetting passwords, and simply turning on a device's power button. This practice takes the expert technician away from performing more critical infrastructure improvements and strategic planning tasks to meet the district's needs. The expert technology staff are not focusing on how to improve the network's performance and security, increase the quality of services, or forecast technical equipment needs. The technology staff work late hours and some weekends to complete all work orders.

School districts often use available staffing formulas to determine the appropriate staffing level for their technology departments. One formula is the number of active workstations (computers) divided by 500 (number of computers that a technology staff could support). Another formula is the number of users (students in a school district) divided by 1,000 (number of users a technician could support). Applying either of these formulas indicates that the DeSoto ISD Technology Department is not consistent with the standard. Applying the number of computers formula indicates that the Technology Department has 13 fewer staff than suggested by the standard (9,025 / 500 = 18 technical staff compared to the district's five). Applying the number of students formula indicates that the Technology Department is not consistent with the standard by four staff (9,399 students / 1,000 = nine technical staff compared to the district's five).

Additionally, effective school districts typically use clerical staff with basic technology skills to handle first-level type support as a helpdesk function. The helpdesk serves as the central point of contact for support requests to the technology function of a district. According to the skill level, the helpdesk staff could handle simple support calls such as logon ID and password resets, setup of new users, and proper use of desktop products. The helpdesk staff manages the helpdesk system to ensure timely processing of work order requests.

FIGURE 10–5
DESOTO ISD TECHNICAL STAFFING COMPARISON TO PEER DISTRICTS
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

DISTRICT	COMPUTERS	TECHNICAL STAFF	COMPUTERS PER TECHNICAL STAFF	STUDENTS	STUDENTS PER TECHNICAL STAFF
Cedar Hill ISD	2,500	8	313	7,883	985
Sharyland ISD	3,800	14	274	10,280	734
Temple ISD	7,300	11	664	8,635	785
DeSoto ISD	**9,025**	**5**	**1,805**	**9,399**	**1,880**

Sources: Legislative Budget Board, Peer Districts Survey Data, February 2015; DeSoto ISD, Technology Department, February 2015.

DeSoto ISD should establish a methodology using an appropriate formula to determine the proper staffing level, set up a helpdesk function, and reorganize the district's Technology Department structure around key functional support areas. The key functional support areas include network, media and presentation, applications, and computer services.

Using one the best practice formulas, the district should develop a methodology to justify and staff the Technology Department to meet the district's technology needs. This methodology is critical as the district adds more computers and technology tools that increase technical support needs. The director of technology services should collaborate with the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools and the chief human resources officer to establish a methodology to determine the appropriate staff needs.

The district's Technology Department should set up a helpdesk function initially using the administrative assistance as the focal point. The director of technology services should provide the administrative assistant with training on the district's helpdesk system and level-one support tasks, such as logon ID and password resets. The director of technology services should set up and publish a dedicated telephone number to be used for technical support calls. Additionally, the director of technology services should restructure the Technology Department organization around functional support areas.

Figure 10–6 shows a recommended Technology Department organizational structure by functional area. Once established, the director of technology services should assign existing and new technical staff to one of the functional areas according to their skill sets and department need.

As the district continues to add computers and other classroom technology devices, the district should assess and consider an increase in the number of technology staff to provide additional campus support. This staff increase would facilitate a timely response to critical technology problems.

The fiscal impact cannot be determined until the district selects a staffing model to identify the number of staff needed. The district could implement the helpdesk-related recommendation with existing resources.

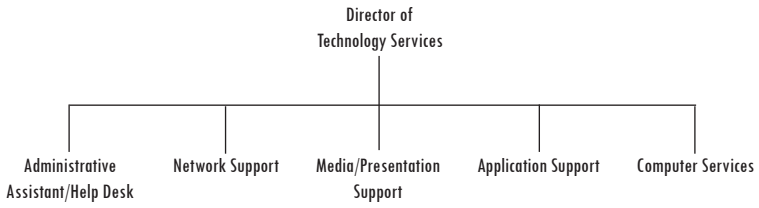
WORKLOAD (REC. 52)

DeSoto ISD's Technology Department lacks a process to monitor and assess the effectiveness of support.

The district uses the HelpDesk system that is included in the Eduphoria SchoolObjects suite of integrated applications to enter problem or service work order tickets. The district staff, CITS, and technology staff enter work order ticket information online using a simple interface. The system has the capability to track and report statistical data for open and completed work orders. The technology staff access and review the application daily to manage their support workload. The system has the capability to manage problem or service request work orders from entry to resolution. The review team learned that users, CITS, or technology staff enters about 90 percent of the work orders into the system. However, due to time constraints, the technology staff does not always have the time to record in the system the closeout of work orders or the actions taken.

As a result, the district's practice does not capture accurate support statistics; therefore, adequate data to measure the effectiveness of technical support is not available. In addition, accurate backlog and workload statistics are not available for staff planning use. The district is not maximizing the benefits of the system because technical staff does not enter all technical resolutions in the system in a timely manner.

FIGURE 10–6
DESOTO ISD PROPOSED TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATION
SCHOOL YEAR 2015–16



NOTE: Position titles named are existing positions.
SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, February 2015.

Districts establish evaluation measures to determine their technology support effectiveness. Effective evaluation measures include measurable goals and objectives, key performance indicators, quality measures, and benchmarks or standards for comparison purposes. Some samples of key performance indicators are:

- service request acknowledgement time;
- service request resolution time;
- hardware request completion time;
- helpdesk first contact resolution;
- helpdesk abandonment rate; and
- helpdesk speed to answer.

Figure 10–7 shows examples of key performance indicators used by Keller ISD.

FIGURE 10–7
KELLER ISD KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR
JANUARY 2013

MEASURE	TARGET
Incident Acknowledgement Time	More than 95%
Incident Resolution Time	More than 95%
Workstation Request Completion Time	More than 95%
Service Desk First Contact Resolution	Less than 25%
Service Desk Abandonment Rate	Less than 25%
Service Desk Speed to Answer	Less than 2 minutes
Operating System Instance Availability	More than 99.5%
Messaging Availability	More than 99.5%
Core Router and Switch Availability	More than 99.5%
Campus Router and Switch Availability	More than 99.5%

SOURCE: Keller ISD, January 2013.

DeSoto ISD should develop key performance indicators with targets to measure the effectiveness of district technology support, including maximizing the capabilities of the helpdesk system and using it to track and monitor performance against the indicator targets.

In addition, DeSoto ISD should develop a procedure that requires the technical staff and CITS to enter all support work performed in the system. The procedure should include entry of data to indicate the type of support performed and the corrective action taken to resolve the issue. This data could be used to gauge and monitor support performance and identify areas for improvement.

The technical staff should establish key performance indicators and develop a procedure to capture all support work performed. The director of technology services should publish key performance indicator results to the district leadership monthly.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

TRAINING (REC. 53)

DeSoto ISD's Technology Department staff lacks adequate professional development and training to support all the technology used in the district.

The district's expert technology staffs are performing as generalists and lack adequate time to receive training for specialized technology tasks. Therefore, they perform many tasks by trial and error. During interviews with the technology staff, they indicated that 70 percent of their time was spent solving helpdesk issues. As a result, they did not have time to receive professional development in their specialty fields. As such, no funds have been allocated for professional development and training.

The technology staff does not always have the appropriate knowledge to perform their assigned responsibilities. The lack of training requires the technical staff to search for solutions to solve a problem, such as free online videos or by calling the manufacturer for free assistance. These extra steps in the process delay the ability of the technology staff to resolve technical problems and require them to work extended hours.

High-performing school districts' technology departments include a professional development and training plan for staff to remain up-to-date regarding new technology and to continue striving to master existing technology. A professional development and training plan typically consists of clear guidelines for areas of improvement, including goals, rationales, activities, milestones, resources, and a statement of consequences if there is no evidence of growth.

DeSoto ISD's Technology Department leadership should assess technology staff skill sets against the district's support needs and develop professional development and training plans to address deficiencies. The director of technology services should work with the Financial Services Department to establish a training budget to fund the professional development plan. Additionally, the Technology Department should regularly evaluate the progress against the plan to

determine needed adjustments to meet the district's technology needs.

The fiscal impact assumes that, based on the 2014 Training Industry Report, a professional development publication, on average, across all industries including education, organizations spent $976 per employee for training. Using that figure as the base with the total technology staff of five, the annual training expense for the Technology Department would be $4,880 ($976 x 5).

CROSS TRAINING (REC. 54)

DeSoto ISD lacks cross-trained technical positions to perform critical tasks to support the district's financial system reporting and PEIMS data submission.

As of the time of this review, the systems administrator provides internal reporting support for the district's financial system, TEAMS ERP, and SIS. This position serves as the district's liaison with the system vendor. The systems administrator develops customized reports of critical data used for district management. In addition, the PEIMS specialist is responsible for submission of PEIMS data to meet TEA's reporting requirements. The PEIMS specialist provides critical support to the campus attendance/PEIMS clerks. No other positions are able to perform these duties in their absence.

As a result, DeSoto ISD is at risk for being unable to produce key management reports or meet reporting deadlines for TEA data submission if either of these individuals is unavailable.

During onsite interviews with the campus attendance/PEIMS clerks, the review team learned that the PEIMS specialist is a critical resource to enable them to get their jobs done effectively. The PEIMS specialist provides support regarding the procedures of submitting timely and accurate PEIMS data to TEA. Additionally, if the systems administrator is unavailable, another staff is not designated to work with the vendor to troubleshoot a problem.

DeSoto ISD should implement a process to designate and cross-train staff for the systems administrator and PEIMS support functions for the district. The district should allow the designated staff adequate time to be fully trained and spend time with the incumbent. The assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools and the director of technology services should coordinate to identify the staff members that should be cross-trained, and the incumbents should be responsible for cross-training in their job responsibilities.

This recommendation assumes existing staff could be cross-trained for both positions. Therefore, this recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

LONG-RANGE TECHNOLOGY PLAN (REC. 55)

DeSoto ISD lacks an up-to-date long-range technology plan that incorporates the District Improvement Plan and Campus Improvement Plans.

The Texas Education Code, Section 11.251, requires districts to produce an annual District Improvement Plan (DIP), which is supposed to guide district and campus staff toward improving all student groups' performance to attain state standards for academic excellence indicators. Each campus within each school district must also develop, review, and revise annually a Campus Improvement Plan (CIP). The CIP serves as the blueprint for how each campus will actually address the objectives and goals in the DIP.

School districts also must produce annual long-range technology plans that measure the use of educational technology to meet district goals. The long-range plans should incorporate goals and strategies found in the DIP and CIPs that discuss educational technology. In addition, the long-range technology plan should not have any goals or strategies that conflict with those found in the DIP or CIP.

DeSoto ISD's 2013–14 to 2016–17 long-range technology plan is not comprehensive because it does not consider the technology-specific schedule related to components from the DIP and CIPs. The plan has all the timelines stated for January 2013 to July 2015, but it has no specific schedule for the implementation of strategies. TEA approved the plan through 2016–17.

Goal 3 of DeSoto ISD's long-range technology plan is not adequately addressed in the DIP. This goal states that the district will "create a technology-enriched school district that transforms the delivery of instruction and prepares students for the competitive workplace." This goal has five performance objectives with definitive timelines for review. Although this goal is measurable, the district does not have a process to review the plan each year and update it to reflect changes taking place in the district. For example, the lease program was not a component of the long-range plan, and the district has not updated the plan to include it. The plan itself is evidence that it does not address the technology-related

equipment needs for up-to-date classrooms, which include more than computers. The development of the long-range plan was primarily for E-rate submission and not for budgeting purposes. E-rate is the commonly used name for the Schools and Libraries Program of the Universal Service Fund, which is administered by the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) in accordance with the direction of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The program provides discounts to assist U.S. schools and libraries to obtain affordable telecommunications and Internet access. It is one of four support programs funded through a universal service fee charged to companies that provide interstate and/or international telecommunications services. Most of the major technology initiatives are stand-alone projects that have funds planned and allocated as approved.

DeSoto ISD's technology committee is inactive. The district lacks a technology committee to encourage and facilitate communication within the school community through technology. A technology committee helps facilitate strategic technology goals established in the long-range technology plan and evaluates the district's present and upcoming technology needs. The district lacks the assistance of the technology committee when assessing technology requirements by means of conducting surveys and interviewing key stakeholders.

Effective school districts develop a three-year, long-range plan that provides adequate time for planning, acquisition, implementation, and training on any new processes and equipment required to implement the plan. Districts that develop a comprehensive plan incorporate the DIP and CIPs. Technology plans typically include goals, action plans, timelines, performance measures, success factors, and financial requirements and allocations. The plan identifies designated staff responsible for a specific goal or strategy and for managing its implementation.

Effective districts establish a well-assembled technology committee to assist with the development and approval of the long-range technology plan. The committee reviews, prioritizes, and approves all major technology initiatives.

Long-range technology plans that effectively meet districts' technology needs include:

- involvement of the technology committee, which meets regularly during the development of the plan to provide input and review progress; upon completion and approval of the plan, the technology committee should meet twice annually to review progress in accomplishing the plan's goals and to update the plan as needed;
- performing a formal needs assessment of the administrative and operational systems for upgrade or replacement requirements, including those used by the transportation and child nutrition departments;
- reviewing the technology department budgeting process and establishing a distinctive budget model and guidelines for districtwide technology department spending managed by a director; and
- reviewing instructional technology applications and tools used throughout the district to gauge their effectiveness.

Figure 10–8 shows key components of Boerne ISD's comprehensive technology plan compared to DeSoto ISD's technology plan.

Boerne ISD developed an effective technology plan that is comprehensive and details the district's needs assessment along with usage of technology tools, professional development, technology competency and literacy requirements, administrative technology, and technology replacement cycles.

DeSoto ISD should evaluate the district's technology needs and develop a three-year, long-range technology plan that considers the district's DIP and CIPs.

The district should activate its technology committee with representation from board members, administration, teachers, technical staff, students, parents, and the community.

The district should engage the technology committee to assist when assessing technology requirements and conducting surveys and interviews of key stakeholders. The information gathered from this process should provide the district with the necessary information to develop the long-range plan.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

PROCEDURES (REC. 56)

DeSoto ISD lacks documented procedures to govern and provide guidelines to handle technology-related operational and support activities.

FIGURE 10–8
KEY COMPONENTS OF BOERNE ISD'S LONG-RANGE TECHNOLOGY PLAN COMPARED TO DESOTO ISD
2015

BOERNE ISD	DESOTO ISD
District profile: includes district statistics such as number of campuses, students, technology budget, and technology infrastructure	Included
Executive summary and background information: includes technology planning committee organization, vision and goal statements	Included
Needs assessment: assessment process and outcome of what is needed in the district	Included
Technology infrastructure goals and objectives, including network standards	Included
Instructional technology standards, acquisition process, and usage	Incomplete
Technology literacy and professional development requirements	Included
Administrative and business operations technology standards, acquisition process, and usage	Incomplete
Technology replacement cycles	Not included
Hardware/software standards and acquisition process	Incomplete
Budget projections and funding sources	Incomplete

SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, February 2015; Boerne ISD, February 2015.

An acceptable use policy (AUP) is a set of rules applied by the owner, developer, or administrator of a network, website, or service, that restricts the ways in which the network, website, or system may be used and sets guidelines as to how it should be used. DeSoto ISD's AUP regulates staff and student hardware use and access to the Internet. However, the district does not post the AUP policy on its website for easy access and review. The district has several policies in the Board of Trustees' online policy manual governing the use of technology resources.

The Technology Department has no formal written procedures documenting and providing guidelines for performing information technology functions, such as installing a new network printer or repairing devices used in the BYOD program. Therefore, the technology staff uses their personal judgment, free online videos, and trial and error methods to handle support issues and resolve technical problems. The technical staff does not document how they fixed the technical issues, so the next technical staff that encounter a similar issue start the process without guidelines and by using elimination methods until the problem is fixed.

As a result, the technical staff does not provide technical support in the most efficient and effective manner. Without documented procedures, there is no clear direction or consistency on how to handle similar situations, which could lead to more time-consuming resolutions and unreliable customer service practices. In addition, a lack of procedures could result in situations such as district staff being unable to access email, financial and student information, and network files when absences occur among the technical staff. Having no written procedures also leaves the district vulnerable to losing institutional knowledge in the event of staff turnover.

Documented procedures assist with streamlining daily operations and troubleshooting non-routine problems. In addition, written procedures enhance the efficiency and overall effectiveness of the technical staff in handling the technology-related needs of the district. **Figure 10–9** shows the table of contents for Florida's Okeechobee County Schools Information Technology Policies and Procedures Manual. These policies and procedures are well-structured and comprehensive.

FIGURE 10–9
OKEECHOBEE COUNTY, FLORIDA, SCHOOLS INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL CONTENTS EXAMPLE
2008

I. Purpose
II. Access to Policy
III. Ownership and Use of Information Technology Resources
IV. Technology Equipment
V. Software
VI. Guidelines for the Use of Technology Resources
    a. Guidelines for All Users
    b. Safety Guidelines for All Users
VII. Access to Technology Resources
VIII. User Accounts

FIGURE 10–9 (CONTINUED)
OKEECHOBEE COUNTY, FLORIDA, SCHOOLS INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL CONTENTS EXAMPLE 2008

IX. Passwords

X. Disclosure of Passwords

XI. Network Management and Security

- a. Bandwidth
- b. Hacking
- c. Port Scanning and Sniffing
- d. Network Infrastructure and Communications Closets
- e. Network Address Assignment and Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol
- f. Domain Name Registration
- g. Wireless Networks
- h. Anonymous File Transfer Protocol Sites
- i. Firewalls

XII. Laptop Computer and Electronic Data Mobile Device Security

- a. Policy Statement
- b. Reason for Policy/Purpose
- c. Protection of Confidential Data
- d. Definitions
- e. Policy/Procedures
- f. Protection of Confidential Data
- g. Reporting Loss/Theft of Equipment or Data
- h. Disposal of Property Used to Access or Store Confidential data

XIII. Electronic Mail

- a. Definition of Email
- b. Purpose
- c. Procedures

XIV. Student Technology Privileges and Acceptable Use

- a. Computer Lab Scheduling/Rules
- b. Telecommunication Plan and Electronic Communication Use Policy
- c. Violating Internet Policy, Rules, and Regulations or Inappropriate Use of the Network
- d. Safety Guidelines for Students

XV. Web Publishing Policy

- a. Statement of Purpose
- b. Design and Development Guidelines
- c. Content Guidelines for Department, School, and Teacher Web Pages
- d. Best Practices Guidelines for Web Page Development
- e. Website Limitations and Restrictions
- f. Video and Audio Podcasts

XVI. Loss Prevention, Emergency Preparedness, and Disaster Recovery

SOURCE: Okeechobee County Schools, Okeechobee, Florida, 2008.

DeSoto ISD should develop documented procedures to govern and provide guidelines to handle technology-related operational and support activities. The director of technology services and the staff should identify functions and activities that make a process more effective. The director of technology services should designate a staff member to draft procedures and then have the rest of the staff review them. The director should then approve the procedures for publication in a written manual distributed to all technology staff and placed on the district's website.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

DISASTER RECOVERY (REC. 57)

DeSoto ISD lacks an effective process for maintaining district network operations during a disaster or outage.

DeSoto ISD has a comprehensive disaster recovery plan that outlines key personnel to notify and involve in a disaster recovery situation. The plan outlines steps to be taken and key systems to restore so that the district can resume operations. Dallas County Schools provides Internet services for Desoto ISD and hosts the web-based systems for disaster recovery and data backups. To secure the rotated backup tapes with the internal server data, the district stored these tapes in the administration building at the Instructional Support Center in a fireproof vault. A generator provides backup power to the data center that it is located in the high school campus, in the event of an extended power outage. In addition, the district installed power surge protectors for the servers in case of a power spike and to allow other data center equipment to power down correctly during a power outage. The district's disaster recovery team consists of the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools; the director of technology services; the senior media manager; and the network analyst.

The district lacks a redundant network infrastructure to maintain connectivity if the main district or a campus network connection is down. A redundant network infrastructure serves as a backup mechanism for quickly swapping network operations onto an extra network infrastructure in the event of unplanned network outages. In addition, the district lacks a designated backup data center facility to use in the event the data center is inoperable. A designated backup data center is an offsite facility that houses copies of the network data disks and that are available to retrieve in case of data accessibility failure.

The primary objective of having a redundant network infrastructure and a backup data center facility is to ensure the district could return to full operation as quickly as possible after a disaster or outage. With neither of these safety measures in place, the district risks not having access to the systems applications, Internet, email, and telephone service. It would be difficult for the district to operate without access to these critical systems.

Many districts install land-based, alternative networks to provide redundancy and backup for a wireless network. Taft ISD's backup network architecture is an underground, 24-pair, fiber-optic ring interconnecting all campuses and the administration building. The ring provides redundancy so in the event of power failure, the entire network would not be down or it could be rerouted to restore connectivity to any affected location.

Additionally, effective districts maintain a backup data center facility at least five miles from the main data center. This facility maintains a district's key computing operations in case of a disaster that renders the main data center inoperable.

DeSoto ISD should develop and install a redundant network infrastructure and establish a backup data center facility to use in the event a disaster renders the district's data center inoperable. The district should consider a similar setup to Taft ISD's backup network architecture as a starting point for the redundant network model. In addition, the district should consider alternate routes for telecommunications and Internet traffic coming into the district.

The district should locate and employ a backup data center that has the capacity to maintain the critical computing operations and functions if the main data center becomes inoperable for an extended period. Dallas County Schools should be considered as a possible backup data center because it is the district's Internet service provider. The district should also consider the Regional Education Service Center X (Region 10) as a backup location.

The director of technology services should engage the disaster recovery team to assess and approve redundancy and backup requirements. The network analyst should develop the redundant network architecture and select a backup data center facility.

The fiscal impact cannot be determined until the district analyzes the unknown expenses associated with the selection of the redundant network architecture and backup data center location.

SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION (REC. 58)

DeSoto ISD does not effectively use all of the modules in the district's financial and student operations system.

In school year 2013–14, DeSoto ISD implemented the Prologic TEAMS ERP and SIS systems. During interviews with Technology Department staff, the review team learned there was little to no involvement or input from the key stakeholders in the district's decision to purchase and implement the systems. According to staff, the systems were "thrust" upon them without allowing time for proper transition from the old system. In addition, adequate time was not allocated for testing and user training. District staff uses manual workarounds because users have stated the new systems are too cumbersome.

The review team found in testing system functionality against departmental processes, district staff are not using several features and functions in the system because of a lack of understanding and training. For example, the district's previous financial system, EDPro Finance, provided a fixed assets module that the district used. Assets acquired before implementing the system continue to reside in the previous system, but the district no longer pays for that software license. The new integrated system consists of three modules that use a single database; the modules are Human Resources, Financial Management, and Student Management. The district installed all of the modules of this system, but staff do not fully use all of the components of each module. For example, the financial module allows users to track fixed assets such as computer equipment and systems, but the district is not using this function of the system. Due to the lack of implementation and training of the systems' fixed asset module, the district decided to maintain the assets acquired after implementation of the TEAMS ERP on a spreadsheet. The database and spreadsheet are the sources for the fixed

asset balances and depreciation reported in the audited financial statements. As a result, the district is not realizing the anticipated benefits of integration and systematic control provided through the implementation of the new system.

In system implementations of this magnitude, effective school districts actively engage key stakeholders to ensure they address all of their departmental or process issues and acquire buy-in. Effective districts allocate ample time for transition planning, prototype and parallel testing, and proper training.

DeSoto ISD should assess how to use the district's financial and student systems to provide the required functionality and train the appropriate users on how to use the system. The district leadership should change departmental processes and procedures to match the new system's capabilities and functionality. The district leadership should appoint key stakeholders to assess the system's functionality with the intention of identifying training needs, developing procedures, and training others as needed.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

FISCAL IMPACT

Some of the recommendations provided in this report are based on state or federal laws, rules, or regulations, and should be promptly addressed. Other recommendations are based on comparisons to state or industry standards, or accepted best practices, and should be reviewed to determine the level of priority, appropriate timeline, and method of implementation.

RECOMMENDATION	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	TOTAL 5-YEAR (COSTS) OR SAVINGS	ONE-TIME (COSTS) OR SAVINGS
CHAPTER 10. TECHNOLOGY							
51. Establish a methodology using an appropriate formula to determine the proper staffing level, set up a helpdesk function, and reorganize the district's Technology Department structure around key functional support areas.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
52. Develop key performance indicators with targets to measure the effectiveness of district technology support; including maximizing the capabilities of the helpdesk system and using it to track and monitor performance against the indicator targets.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
53. Assess technology staff skill sets against the district's support needs and develop professional development and training plans to address deficiencies.	($4,880)	($4,880)	($4,880)	($4,880)	($4,880)	($24,400)	$0
54. Implement a process to designate and cross-train staff for the systems administrator and PEIMS support functions for the district.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
55. Evaluate the district's technology needs and develop a three-year, long-range technology plan that considers the district's District Improvement Plan and Campus Improvement Plans.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
56. Develop documented procedures to govern and provide guidelines for handle technology-related operational and support activities.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
57. Develop and install a redundant network infrastructure and establish a backup data center facility to use in the event a disaster renders the district's data center inoperable.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
58. Assess how to use the district's financial and student systems to provide the required functionality and train the appropriate users on how to use the system.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
TOTAL	**($4,880)**	**($4,880)**	**($4,880)**	**($4,880)**	**($4,880)**	**($24,400)**	**$0**

CHAPTER 11. SAFETY AND SECURITY

An independent school district's safety and security function identifies vulnerabilities and includes strategies to minimize risks to ensure a protected learning environment for students and staff. This protection includes a balanced approach of prevention, intervention, enforcement, and recovery. Risks could include environmental disasters, physical hazards, security threats, emergencies, and human-caused crises.

Managing safety and security initiatives is dependent on a district's organizational structure. Larger districts typically have staff dedicated to safety and security, and smaller districts assign staff tasks as a secondary assignment. Safety and security includes ensuring the physical security of both a school and its occupants. A comprehensive approach to planning for physical security considers school locking systems; monitoring systems; equipment and asset protection; visibility of areas and grounds; police/school resource officers; and emergency operations. Emergency and disaster-related procedures must include fire protection, environmental disasters, communication systems, crisis management, and contingency planning. The identification of physical hazards must consider playground safety, and overall building and grounds safety. Environmental factors, such as indoor air quality, mold, asbestos, water management, and waste management, also affect the safety of school facilities.

One of the stated objectives of public education in the Texas Education Code (TEC) is to "provide safe and disciplined environments conducive to learning." To achieve this objective, safety and security operations go hand-in-hand with education, as districts are responsible for protecting students, teachers, and school property while providing a positive learning environment. Working together, district leaders, campus principals, facility managers, transportation supervisors, and safety and security staff look at ways to identify risks and develop plans to mitigate threats.

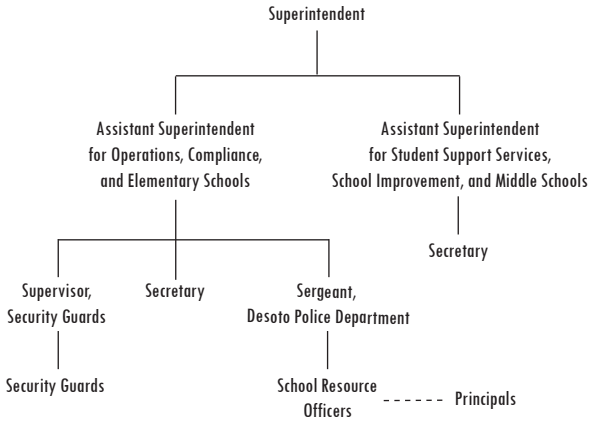
A safe and secure school environment as defined by the U.S. Department of Education, Title IV, Section 401, 21st Century Schools and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act, encompasses: communication systems, fire protection, playground safety, facility safety, environmental regulations, and emergency operation planning.

The assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools oversees DeSoto ISD's safety and security function. In March 2001, the district executed a contract with the City of DeSoto for school resource officers (SROs). The SROs serve as police officers on some of the campuses. Their responsibilities include: developing contacts with DeSoto ISD principals; responding to school crime problems; assisting the district's drug prevention program and comprehensive safety program; and providing law enforcement services. The district security guards patrol their assigned campus area and assist with emergency drills and actual emergencies. The security supervisor serves as the head security guard and reports to the assistant superintendent. In addition, the district contracts with Interquest Detection Canines for illegal substance awareness and detection services.

The assistant superintendent for student support services, school improvement, and middle schools is responsible for monitoring the anonymous safety reporting system, StayALERT. This system enables students, teachers, staff, parents and community members to confidentially report unsafe behaviors, suspicious activities, bullying, acts of violence and harassment. The system is available 24 hours a day and community members can submit reports in English and Spanish via a website, an e-mail, a phone call, or a text message.

Figure 11–1 shows DeSoto ISD's key personnel responsible for the safety and security function.

FIGURE 11–1
DESOTO ISD SAFETY AND SECURITY ORGANIZATION
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15



SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Administration, February 2015.

Figure 11–2 shows the results of a survey the school review team conducted. More than 50 percent of the district and campus staff respondents feel the security personnel have a good relationship with principals and teachers and the district as a whole. Additionally, more than 50 percent of the campus staff who responded feels students respect and like security personnel.

FINDINGS

- DeSoto ISD's safety and security function lacks an organizational structure conducive to effectively managing safety and security operations.
- DeSoto ISD lacks a process to track staff emergency procedures training, conduct all emergency drills, and retain emergency drill records.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 59: Develop a safety and security coordinator position to provide monitoring and oversight to the district's safety and security function.**
- **Recommendation 60: Develop a process to regularly review and update the Emergency Drill and Exercise Plan to ensure staff receives training and the district conducts and records all required drills.**

DETAILED FINDINGS

SAFETY AND SECURITY LEADERSHIP (REC. 59)

DeSoto ISD's safety and security function lacks an organizational structure conducive to effectively managing safety and security operations.

The assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools is responsible for the safety and security functions in the district in addition to other non-safety and security functions. The assistant superintendent's responsibilities related to safety and security include the following:

- oversight and management of safety and security function districtwide;
- monitoring for completion of duties assigned to direct reports;
- policies and procedures for emergency and crisis management;
- periodic safety and security audits;
- budgeting;
- ensuring adequate security camera system and visitor sign in procedures;
- reporting to the superintendent and board of trustees; and
- maintaining drill reports.

FIGURE 11–2
DESOTO ISD STAFF SURVEY RESULTS
FEBRUARY 2015

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NO OPINION	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	SURVEY COUNT
"Security personnel have a good working relationship with principals and teachers."						
District Staff	16.8%	42.9%	39.5%	0.8%	0.0%	119
Campus Staff	20.0%	51.5%	25.2%	2.5%	0.8%	511
"A good working arrangement exists between local law enforcement and the district."						
District Staff	26.1%	48.0%	24.4%	1.7%	0.0%	119
Campus Staff	24.8%	55.6%	18.3%	1.2%	0.2%	513
"Security personnel are respected and liked by the students they serve."						
Campus Staff	16.0%	46.3%	30.9%	4.9%	2.0%	512

NOTE: Totals may not sum due to rounding.
SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, February 2015.

In addition to the safety and security function, the assistant superintendent is also responsible for overseeing the elementary schools, the special education program, grant development, assessments and other duties. The SROs, the security guards, and the assistant principals are other district employees with safety and security responsibilities. The SRO sergeant and the security guard supervisor are each responsible for overseeing their respective groups and each report to the assistant principal. Although the SROs and the security guards work together when discipline issues arise on the campuses, the heads of the two groups do not collaborate. The assistant principals are responsible for completing some emergency drills. The assistant superintendent for student support services, school improvement, and middle schools is responsible for monitoring the anonymous safety reporting system. District staff reported that they do not receive many messages through the safety reporting system. Overall, effective administration and management of the district's safety and security function is difficult due to the district's organizational structure.

The school review team noted several areas in which the district does not comply with the established safety and security policies, plans and procedures. DeSoto ISD conducted a safety and security audit in January 2014, pursuant to TEC, Section 37.108, which requires school districts to conduct a safety and security audit every three years and submit the results to the Texas School Safety Center. Following the audit, the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools worked with the safety committee, chief financial officer and the superintendent to develop an action plan to address the problems noted. These deficiencies included:

- emergency operations plans for district and campuses not complete;
- anti-intruder alarms not used at all campuses;
- lack of cooperation with local agencies or first responders to develop the Emergency Operations Plans;
- lack of updated floor plans;
- lack of training and conducting all emergency drills;
- inadequate fencing; and
- inadequate check in/ check-out procedures.

The assistant superintendent presented the action plans at the June 2014 school board meeting. The assistant superintendent was responsible for developing the action plans and ensuring their completion. The school review team requested an update on the status of the action plans. The district provided details on the steps it took to fulfill some of the action plans, including meeting with the city's first responders and installing fencing. However, at the time of the onsite review the information provided indicated the district had not made progress on most of the action plans. Since the time of the onsite review, the district indicated that it formed an Emergency Operations Planning Team. The team consists of the superintendent, assistant superintendent for operations, compliance and elementary schools, director of communications, and the director of plant services. The team has taken action to review drill feedback and discuss solutions to improve areas of concern, approved a new drill evaluation form, developed preparedness guides, and developed or revised safety and security procedures as necessary. The team developed goals and a calendar for subsequent meetings and plans to revise the district's emergency operations plan in the next meeting.

The district has policies and procedures for access management in place. However, the district is not following all of the policies, which could lead to an unsafe learning environment for staff and students. For example:

- Doors unlocked: DeSoto ISD installed key card readers on two of the doors to each school building during school year 2013–14. The remaining doors are supposed to remain locked. However, the review team found doors leading to playgrounds and portables were sometimes propped open or left unlocked.
- Cameras: The district installed security cameras at all campuses, which the campus principals and SROs could access via a website. However, staff reported difficulty logging into the online system. Staff also reported the positioning of some cameras is ineffective because the entire area is not visible.
- Visitor Check-in/ Check-out: The district requires visitors to the campuses to sign in and present their photo identification at the front desk. The employee at the front desk uses a software program to scan the identification and compare it to a sex offender database. If the software clears the visitor to enter the school, a visitor's badge with the person's name, picture from the photo identification and the reason

they are visiting is printed. The review team observed that an employee did not verify the visitor's badge and on one occasion the badge had the incorrect name. Campus staff do not ensure that all visitors check out as required.

- Student Identification: The district's policy in the 2014–15 Student Handbook and Code of Conduct requires students in grades 6–12 to wear school identification badges at school every day and at all school activities. However, during the onsite review, the review team did not observe any students wearing badges. Staff reported that campuses do not enforce the identification badge requirement.
- Staff Identification: DeSoto ISD's Human Resources Policies and Procedures manual outlines the policies concerning staff identification badges. The identification badges are color-coded based on whether or not the person is a regular staff member or a temporary staff member (for example, substitutes). The district requires all staff to wear the identification badge in plain view; however the review team did not observe staff wearing their badges. The district does not enforce this requirement.

Interviews with staff also indicated confusion related to the duties of some members of the safety and security function. In interviews, staff noted that many campus staff are unaware of the security guards' duties and responsibilities. This confusion led to campus staff making requests of the security guards outside their expertise and job duties, such as filling in for absent teachers. These requests could hinder the ability of the security guards to monitor the schools and respond quickly to any issues that arise.

Although the district has policies and procedures in place for many of the duties and tasks that are part of the safety and security function, it often does not fulfill them due to a lack of oversight and accountability. Although the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools provides high-level oversight of the safety and security function in the district, the large number of other responsibilities the position is responsible for make it difficult to monitor and complete all necessary tasks.

An effective safety and security function requires centralization and coordination to ensure development and enforcement of adequate policies and procedures. This centralization and coordination typically occurs when districts designate an administrator responsible for this function. Distributing responsibility across multiple functions results in a lack of effective oversight and accountability. This environment leads to an absence of structured planning and implementation processes, and approaches and solutions to identified safety related concerns.

DeSoto ISD should develop a safety and security coordinator position to provide monitoring and oversight to the district's safety and security function.

This position should report to the assistant superintendent for student support services and school improvement. (see the District Organization, Leadership, and Management chapter for a recommended reorganization that affects this recommendation.) This coordinator would be responsible for oversight of the safety and security function in the district. The coordinator's responsibilities would include:

- coordinating with campus leaders in implementation of safety procedures;
- ensuring all district staff receives appropriate safety training;
- developing procedures for reporting and monitoring safety and security issues;
- updating employee handbooks to ensure all relevant safety and security information is included, including emergency procedures;
- reviewing and updating all existing safety and security policies and procedures;
- ensuring timely implementation of all action plans developed based on the safety and security audit;
- reviewing and updating job descriptions of safety and security personnel and providing information about the roles of all employees involved in the safety and security function (SROs, security guards, assistant principals);
- conducting drills and retaining drill evaluations;
- meeting with the security guards and SROs to address and remedy any safety and security issues; and
- enforcing compliance with district policies and procedures.

The head security guard and SRO sergeant should report to the safety coordinator.

DeSoto ISD's human resources staff should develop a job description for the position of safety coordinator and post it on the district website. The district should organize a selection committee to fill the position. The selection committee should include the superintendent, chief financial officer and the assistant superintendent for student support services and school improvement.

The fiscal impact assumes a cost for the salary and benefits of the new safety and security coordinator of $64,517. This amount includes a salary of $61,488, the coordinator market value salary, as determined in the district's Texas Association of School Boards salary study and the district's benefits rate of $3,029.

EMERGENCY DRILLS (REC. 60)

DeSoto ISD lacks a process to track staff emergency procedures training, conduct all emergency drills, and retain emergency drill records.

DeSoto ISD has an Emergency Drill and Exercise Plan which describes the types of drills it conducts and reporting and recordkeeping requirements. **Figure 11–3** shows the types of drills and how often the district plans to conduct them.

FIGURE 11–3
DESOTO ISD DRILL SCHEDULE
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15

EVACUATION TYPE	SCHOOL BUILDINGS FREQUENCY	ADMINISTRATION BUILDING FREQUENCY
Building Evacuation	Monthly	Quarterly
Lockdown	Each semester	N/A
Severe Weather Shelter	September and February	N/A
Shelter-in-Place	October and January	N/A
Bomb Threat	Annually	Annually
Table Top Exercises	As scheduled	As scheduled

SOURCE: DeSoto ISD, Emergency Drill and Exercise Plan, February 2015.

The drill plan requires SROs to work with the campus principals to schedule and conduct the drills, document the results, and complete a corrective action plan if problems arise. The plan stipulates that the SROs complete a drill reporting form for each drill and develop a corrective action plan for any problems. District staff reported that in practice, the SROs are responsible for conducting lockdown drills and assistant principals are responsible for other drills. SROs and assistant principals decide the days that drills occur. The district provided drill records for school year 2013–14 that indicate the district either does not perform all required drills on all campuses or does not retain adequate drill records. The records show that all of the campuses conducted some fire and lockdown drills, but indicate the district did not complete drills with the frequency required by the Emergency Drill and Exercise Plan. The SROs and assistant principals are responsible for sending the drill reports to the assistant superintendent no more than 10 days after the drill. The assistant superintendent periodically reviews the drill reports and follows up with the campuses concerning corrective action; however, no formal plan or process for implementing the corrective actions exists.

The district provided lockdown drill evaluations for lockdowns conducted in school years 2013–14 and 2014–15. The lockdown evaluations indicate some classrooms did not follow lockdown procedures; in many cases this was because they were either unaware the campus was in lockdown status or unaware of the correct lockdown procedures. The lockdown evaluations indicate that many campuses may not have received adequate training on the lockdown procedures. The assistant superintendent indicated that no employee is responsible for providing this training or other safety and security training. Some of the campus employee handbooks provide information on the actions to take during an emergency or emergency drill. However, the information included varies between campuses; some of the handbooks do not contain any emergency information. The district plans to train all campus and department managers on emergency procedures in school year 2015–16. The managers would be required to submit agendas and sign-in sheets. The assistant principal also noted that the SROs would be providing training to the district administration.

Although the Reporting and Recordkeeping section of the Emergency Drill and Exercise Plan requires SROs to send drill reports to the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance and elementary schools to retain for at least five years, the district was unable to provide the review team with complete drill records. Without conducting drills, the district does not have the opportunity to assess areas of weakness in the emergency operations procedures for those facilities. By not maintaining complete records of the emergency drills conducted, the district loses the opportunity to use the records to evaluate past performance on drills and improve on emergency procedures.

To make the most out of emergency drills, the Texas School Safety Center recommends the following practices:

- Early in the school year, meet with the campus safety and security team members to talk about the drill schedule for the year. Talk about hazards, planning considerations, changes in student population from the previous year and lingering concerns that should be tested. Identify ways to combine drills to get the most training with the least disruption.
- Have the team set a drill schedule with alternate drill dates in the event that a drill cannot be conducted as planned. Identify what will be practiced, who will practice, when will it take place, and how will it occur. In addition, identify how success will be measured, understanding that speed is not necessarily the best measure of success.
- Share emergency plans and drill options at a faculty meeting, encourage staff to establish a buddy system so that they improve response, deal with emergencies that arise and support substitute teachers.
- Plan to vary the scenarios and timing to strengthen campus response. Drills are designed to test plans and procedures. They are not designed to embarrass people or as a pass/fail. Make sure that the drills are realistic and reflect the plans in place.
- Prior to each drill, define the scope and focus of the drill and write a purpose statement – "The purpose of this drill is to determine whether…."
- Always review safety precautions before starting a drill.
- Use forms, such as those in Planning and Evaluation Tools to facilitate the planning and follow up process.

DeSoto ISD should develop a process to regularly review and update the Emergency Drill and Exercise Plan to ensure staff receives training and the district conducts and records all required drills.

The assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools should revise the Emergency Drill and Exercise Plan to ensure it reflects the process for scheduling, conducting and recording drills the district has in place.

The assistant superintendent should revise the Emergency Drill and Exercise Plan to include a section on training. The training section should contain specific details on the types of training necessary and designate staff members to conduct and record the training. For example, each campus principal could be responsible for training campus staff on emergency procedures early in the school year. The campus principal could keep a record of each staff member who attends the training and provide this information to the assistant superintendent for operations, compliance, and elementary schools. At the administration building, the assistant superintendent could conduct a similar training.

The assistant superintendent should request the drill schedule from the SROs and assistant principals and request an explanation when scheduled drills do not occur. The assistant superintendent should work with the SROs to develop a drill schedule for non-instructional facilities ensuring all recommended drills occur. The assistant superintendent should also prepare and maintain an annual summary of drills performed and prepare a status report for the superintendent. The superintendent and assistant superintendent should meet with the SROs and principals to address any noncompliance with the policy.

After a drill occurs, the assistant superintendent should work with the SROs and the assistant principals to address any deficiencies noted in the emergency drill reports. They should develop an action plan for improving the emergency drills and use the results from the next drill to ascertain whether or not the plan was adequate.

This recommendation could be implemented with existing resources.

FISCAL IMPACT

Some of the recommendations provided in this report are based on state or federal laws, rules, or regulations, and should be promptly addressed. Other recommendations are based on comparisons to state or industry standards, or accepted best practices, and should be reviewed to determine the level of priority, appropriate timeline, and method of implementation.

RECOMMENDATION	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	TOTAL 5-YEAR (COSTS) OR SAVINGS	ONE–TIME (COSTS) OR SAVINGS
CHAPTER 11. SAFETY AND SECURITY							
59. Develop a safety and security coordinator position to provide monitoring and oversight to the district's safety and security function.	($64,517)	($64,517)	($64,517)	($64,517)	($64,517)	($322,585)	$0
60. Develop a process to regularly review and update the Emergency Drill and Exercise Plan to ensure staff receives training and the district conducts and records all required drills.	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
TOTAL	**($64,517)**	**($64,517)**	**($64,517)**	**($64,517)**	**($64,517)**	**($322,585)**	**$0**