

Executive Summary



CMSi Curriculum Audit™ Milton-Union Exempted Village School District

July 2021

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This document is comprised of two sections:

The Executive Summary provides an overview of the audit findings and recommendations in a short, graphic format.

The Full Report gives a more complete discussion of audit methodology and discusses the findings and recommendations at length. The Full Report also presents the extensive data analyzed and an explanation of what those data demonstrated in the context of the audit.



MUEVSD CURRICULUM AUDIT by the numbers

Site Visit Date:
March 10-12, 2021

25

interviews conducted
with staff, administrators,
board members, and
parents



103

documents collected
for review



41

classrooms observed



129

survey responses from parents,
teachers, and administrators



78

student work
artifacts evaluated

Introduction: The CMSi Curriculum Audit



This document constitutes the Executive Summary of a Curriculum Audit of the Milton-Union Exempted Village School District in West Milton, Ohio. A Curriculum Audit is designed to reveal the extent to which leaders and personnel of a school district have developed and implemented a coordinated, valid, and comprehensive system to manage the design, development, implementation, evaluation, and support of curriculum. Curriculum is defined as the set of learnings students are expected to master over the course of their years in the district. The system to manage this curriculum, when implemented effectively and in alignment with the district’s vision for student engagement, will yield improved student learning and achievement over time if all its related processes and components are operating in coordination with one another. Effective curriculum management results as well in increased efficiency and assures district taxpayers that all fiscal support is optimized within the conditions under which the district functions.

District Background

Milton-Union Exempted Village School District spans 46 square miles, and the current educational complex includes interconnected buildings for Milton-Union Elementary School, Lowry Learning Center, Milton-Union Middle School, Milton-Union High School, and a

separate building located on the same property that houses district personnel and is used for board of education meetings. The tax rate per \$1,000 of assessed valuation was \$66.80 for fiscal year 2020, and the school district levies a 1.25%, dual purpose, earned income tax. Dr. Brad Ritchey has been the superintendent for the past five years, and the five members of the Milton-Union Exempted Village School District Board of Education are Ben Dehus, Jessica Brumbaugh, Lori Ginn Parsons, Beth Stasiak, and Doug Thompson. The district has had consistent enrollment over the past four years, decreasing by only one student over that period. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) District Demographic Dashboard 2014-18, the students in Milton-Union Exempted Village School District are 99% White and 1% two or more races; 100% of students speak only the English language at home, and 8% of families have income below poverty level.

System Purpose for Conducting the Audit

Auditors were presented with information that the district authorized two different audits in 2019 to determine organizational performance in curriculum, instruction, and equity. Following the receipt of the findings from those audits, the district has provided professional development to staff members that supports further integration of standards-based learning

and student access to meaningful instruction and content. The district administrative team seeks to further gauge district and building progress in these areas through the CMSi audit process. District officials stated that students are underperforming, and according to the previous audit findings, poverty is also a major variable for Milton-Union students and families. In striving for equity, access, and to meet the unique needs of all kids, the district seeks to engage routinely in the cyclical process of continuous improvement for learners, families, and community members. The Milton-Union Exempted Village School District seeks to identify, create, and use the systems and infrastructure required to support students across the learning continuum, including through interventions, supports, and opportunities for growth and enrichment. The district is approaching these audit findings as an opportunity to benchmark progress, identify next steps, and focus efforts and resources to maximize efficiency and production.

“It feels like this is such fertile ground with less than 1,500 students and 90 staff.”—District Administrator

CMSi Audit History

The Curriculum Management Audit has established itself as a process of integrity and candor in assessing public school districts. Over the last 40 years, it has become recognized internationally as an important, viable, and valid tool for the improvement of educational

institutions and for the improvement of curriculum design and delivery.

The Curriculum Audit represents a “systems” approach to educational improvement, that is, it considers the system as a whole rather than a collection of separate, discrete parts. Auditors closely examine and evaluate the interrelationships of system departments, levels, and related processes and their impact on overall quality of the organization in accomplishing its primary purpose: improving student learning.

The audit process was developed by Dr. Fenwick W. English and first implemented in 1979 in the Columbus Public School District in Columbus, Ohio. The audit is based upon generally-accepted concepts pertaining to effective instruction and curricular design and delivery, some of which have been popularly referred to as the “effective schools research.” An audit is an independent examination of four data sources: documents, interviews, online surveys, and site visits. These are gathered and triangulated to reveal the extent to which a school district is meeting its goals and objectives related to improving student learning and achievement. The process culminates in a comprehensive written report to district leaders that summarizes district strengths, findings, and the auditors’ recommended actions for improvement.

Curriculum management audits have been performed in hundreds of school systems in more than 46 states, the District of Columbia, and several other countries, including Canada, Saudi Arabia, New Zealand, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Bermuda. Details about the methodology employed in the audit process and biographical information about the audit team are covered in the Appendices.

Audit Scope of Work

The audit's scope is centered on curriculum and instruction, and any aspect of operations of a school system that enhances or hinders its design and/or delivery. The audit is an intensive, focused, "snapshot" evaluation of how well a school system such as Milton-Union Exempted Village School District has been able to set valid directions for pupil accomplishment and well-being, concentrate its resources to accomplish those directions, and improve its performance, however contextually defined or measured, over time.

The Curriculum Management Audit does not examine any aspect of school system operations unless it pertains to the design and delivery of curriculum. For example, auditors would not examine the cafeteria function unless students were going hungry and, therefore, were not learning. In some cases, ancillary findings in a Curriculum Audit are so interconnected with the capability of a school system to attain its central objectives that they become major, interactive forces that, if not addressed, will severely compromise the ability of the school system to be successful with its students.

The Curriculum Audit centers its focus on the main business of schools: teaching, curriculum, and learning. Auditors use five focus areas against which to compare, verify, and comment upon a district's existing curricular management practices. The focus areas reflect an ideal management system, but not an unattainable one. They describe working characteristics that any complex work organization should possess in achieving stated organizational goals while being responsive to the unique needs of its clients.

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

The five focus areas employed in the CMSi Curriculum Audit™ are:

- 1 District Vision and Accountability:** The school district has a clear vision and demonstrates its control of resources, programs, and personnel.
- 2 Curriculum:** The school district has established clear and valid objectives for students and clientele.
- 3 Consistency and Equity:** The school district has demonstrated internal consistency and rational equity in its program development and implementation.
- 4 Feedback:** The school district has used the results from district-designed or adopted assessments to adjust, improve, or terminate ineffective practices or programs.
- 5 Productivity:** The school district has improved its productivity and efficiency, particularly in the use of resources.

The auditors report where and how district practices, policies, and processes have met or not met the criteria and expectations related to each focus area, and specific action steps are recommended in a separate section for rectifying areas needing improvement. These findings and corresponding recommendations are reported in detail in the full report.



Milton-Union Exempted Village School District Strengths

The Milton-Union Exempted Village School District in West Milton, OH, serves over 1,500 students across three schools. The auditors noted several areas of strength in the district:

1 Proud Heritage and Historical Connection to West Milton and Union Townships

2 Consistent Student Annual Enrollment

3 LEED Certified Gold Rated Educational Facility with Interconnected Schools

4 1:1 Technology at All Schools

5 Stable Administrative Leadership

6 Numerous Grants Awarded to District

“We are 1:1 with technology in the district.”—Building Administrator

1 Proud Heritage and Historical Connection to West Milton and Union Townships

Milton-Union Exempted Village School District is located in Miami County, Ohio, and includes the townships of West Milton, Union, Laura, Potsdam, Ludlow Falls, Kessler, Nashville, and Garland. Union Township was formed in 1807 as one of the earliest townships in Miami County and is crossed by both the Stillwater River and Ludlow Creek where Ludlow Falls is located. The village of West Milton also dates back to 1807, and the earliest documented Milton-Union High School alumni are Alice Hart and Retta Kellogg in 1883. Early schools in the Milton-Union Exempted Village School District included the Garland Country School, Laura School, Potsdam School, Ludlow Falls School, West Milton School (1850-1908), McKinley Building (1909), and Milton-Union High School (1909 to present). The village of West Milton had an approximate population of 4,828 in 2019.

“We have done Universal Design for Learning (UDL) training that is about instructional strategies. We did get training from SpringBoard.”—Teacher

2 Consistent Student Annual Enrollment

Milton-Union Exempted Village School District has had consistent enrollment over the past four years. In documents provided to auditors, district enrollment was listed as 1,510 students in fiscal year 2018, 1,503 students in fiscal year 2019, 1,509 students in fiscal year 2020, and 1,509 students in fiscal year 2021. Milton-Union High School is listed as having 471 students, Milton-Union Middle School is listed as having

347 students, and Milton-Union Elementary School is listed as having 651 students enrolled. Auditors noted that district enrollment has only decreased by one student over the past four years.

3 LEED Certified Gold Rated Educational Facility with Interconnected Schools

The current educational facility covers 210,919 square feet and includes interconnected buildings for Milton-Union Elementary School, Lowry Learning Center, Milton-Union Middle School, Milton-Union High School, and a separate building also located on the same property that houses district personnel and is used for board of education meetings. The building was completed in 2012, built under LEED version 3.0, and achieved Gold rating. The tax rate per \$1,000 of assessed valuation was \$66.80 for fiscal year 2020, and the school district levies a 1.25%, dual purpose, earned income tax. Of the 1.25%, 1.15% is used to provide the local portion of a school facilities project that replaced all existing school facilities within the district with a new kindergarten through grade 12 building on one site, including debt retirement and the required maintenance fund. The remaining .10% of the total levy amount is used for general operating purposes.



4 1:1 Technology at All Schools

The Milton-Union Exempted Village School District provides all students and staff members with technology devices to aid in student learning and increase work efficiency. Each classroom has equal access to the same technology that is available throughout the building and is accentuated by centrally located Lowry Learning Center to provide additional support, technology, and resources to both students and staff.

“We got the Striving Readers grant, and it was a three-year grant cycle. That provided us a literacy coach and professional development on the Letters program.”— Building Administrator

5 Stable Administrative Leadership

Dr. Brad Ritchey has served as the superintendent of the Milton-Union Exempted Village School District for the past five years from 2016-2021. Prior to his leadership, Virginia Rammel served as superintendent for the nine-year span between 2007 and 2016. Auditors noted that having two superintendents over this 14-year period represents stability in the district and an improved ability to ensure district initiatives have appropriate follow through.

“Every grade level has the same type of technology device. We have SMART boards, white boards, and document cameras as well as DVD players.”—Teacher

6 Numerous Grants Awarded to District

The Milton-Union Exempted Village School District submits grant applications each year and has been awarded a variety of grants to assist student learning. These grants include the Striving Readers Grant to help improve student literacy and the School Quality Improvement Grant to increase educator capacity within the school building. Furthermore, these grants have also helped to fund textbooks, technology, and professional development sessions for staff.



Key Focus Areas

1

District Vision and Accountability: Vision is foundational for establishing a framework for all decision making throughout the district and for ensuring that those decisions move the district in the same direction, toward its established mission and goals. These goals and expectations must be clearly defined in policy to establish the parameters within which decisions across the various levels, departments, and campuses/schools are made. A functional organizational structure is also needed to assure that all personnel have defined responsibilities that don't overlap and to assure accountability at all levels. Accountability is an important part of coordinating efforts and supporting efficacy across the system.

2

Curriculum: Written curriculum, as the most critical tool to support high quality teaching and learning, is essential in not only defining high levels of student learning, but also in supporting teachers with suggestions on how to deliver differentiated, student-centered instruction that is responsive to needs, backgrounds, and perspectives. A strong curriculum assists teachers in meeting the needs of their students more effectively by prioritizing and defining in measurable terms the essential learnings, and providing the formative assessment tools needed to diagnose and monitor student learning. Strong written curriculum also supports equity, by clarifying for teachers what on-level learning looks like.

3

Consistency and Equity: All students in the system should have equal access to programs and services, and no students should be excluded from the regular classroom environment at rates that aren't commensurate with their peers. Equity refers to students being treated in accordance with need, rather than the same as everyone else. Allocating resources and supports equitably is necessary if all students are to be equally successful, academically. Under Consistency and Equity, auditors also examine the degree to which the educational program and its supporting programs, such as ELL, Special Education, or Gifted, are defined and implemented with consistency across the system.

4

Feedback: Within the context of student learning expectations and a clear vision for how students should be engaged and demonstrate their learning in the classroom, having aligned assessments that measure progress and provide feedback on strengths and weaknesses of the system is of prime importance. The audit expects school systems to provide common, aligned formative assessment tools that provide teachers and building leaders with clear and specific feedback regarding student progress and learning needs. There must also be a coordinated system in place whereby data are collected, interpreted, and accessible by teachers so they have valid information from which to plan instruction.

5

Productivity: When all aspects of system operations are functional and effective, there should be evidence of productivity within existing financial constraints. Over time, as the system improves and each department and school within the district has stronger components that work in coordination, these systems improve leaders' efforts to allocate resources more effectively and adjust programming so that ineffective initiatives are terminated or modified in accordance with data. Support systems necessary to effective operations are also clearly tied to district goals and vision and district facilities are likewise supportive of the educational program.

What We Found

The site visit for the Milton-Union Exempted Village School District audit was conducted March 10-12, 2021, by two CMSi auditors. The audit team also included one off-site auditor. Their biographical sketches are provided in **Appendix A**. The auditors analyzed over 103 different documents, many with multiple editions (e.g., board policies, administrative guidelines, curriculum documents) prior to, during, and after the site visit. A copy of the list of documents is provided in **Appendix C**. While in the district, the auditors visited 41 classrooms in three schools and personally interviewed approximately 25 district stakeholders, including the superintendent, district administrators, principals, assistant principals, counselors, teachers, instructional support staff, and parents. Due to the pandemic and social distancing requirements, a portion of the interviews were held via Zoom. The auditors also administered online parent, teacher, and administrator surveys prior to, during, and after the site visit, for which they received 81, 40, and 8 responses, respectively.

**“We need additional assessment tools in Math.”
—Teacher**

The auditors triangulated information from these sources of data to arrive at 11 findings and 5 recommendations based on the 5 audit focus areas. The findings provide the Milton-Union Exempted Village School District with specific details about the current and potential barriers and challenges that internal stakeholders face in their efforts to move the district toward achieving its mission and goals, centered on student learning. The recommendations provide detailed action steps for removing those barriers. [Note: Each of the recommendations covers multiple findings. All recommendations should be completed in one to four years.]

“The district does not provide ‘district-developed curriculum.’ They provide state standards.”—Teacher

A summary of the audit findings under the five focus areas included in the Milton-Union Exempted Village School District full report follows.

Focus Area One: District Vision and Accountability

When reviewing the status of Milton-Union Exempted Village School District in relationship to the principles of **Focus Area One**, which addresses system control and oversight, the auditors found the Milton-Union Exempted Village School District board policies and administrative guidelines were compliant with state requirements but did not include clear expectations for student learning and engagement and a vision for academic excellence. Policies did not address the systems needed to manage the alignment of curriculum across the system, nor include expectations for improving the overall educational program. The district does not have a formal procedure



for distributing newly created and revised policies and administrative guidelines to promote awareness of changes in expectation (see **Finding 1.1**).

The Milton-Union Exempted Village School District has an organizational chart, although policy does not require it. The current organizational chart meets or partially meets several principles for sound organizational management, but teachers need to be included to assure that the line function is accurately represented. Additionally, current job descriptions are adequate in most areas except in specifying clear linkages to curriculum (see **Finding 1.2**).

“Looking at state tests, we are fairly average in terms of component and letter grades on the state report card.”—District Administrator

Focus Area Two: Curriculum

Under **Focus Area Two**, the auditors examined direction provided by Milton-Union Exempted Village School District for teaching and learning. They looked for systematic curriculum management planning, representation of curriculum offerings in high quality curriculum guides, and clear alignment of the written, taught, and tested curriculum.

The auditors found that Milton-Union Exempted Village School District needs a comprehensive written plan to coordinate the development, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum. Although some elements of curriculum management planning were identified, they lack the specificity to provide needed direction for the design and delivery of the curriculum to achieve the district’s student achievement goals (see **Finding 2.1**).

Auditors also found that there is not enough curriculum available to teachers to support effective and aligned instruction; overall, 4% of total course offerings have written curriculum in grades K-12 (see **Exhibit 2.2.5**).

“We need to get on the same page with the curriculum. Everyone has created their own fiefdom.”—District Administrator

Focus Area Three: Consistency and Equity

Under **Focus Area Three**, the auditors looked for predictable consistency in curriculum and curriculum delivery; equality of course access and opportunities; and the allocation of resources to areas of greatest need.

The auditors observed in 41 classrooms and found that current instructional practices were characterized by low cognition and limited differentiation in whole-class, teacher-centered classrooms. The Milton-Union Exempted Village School District also has no formalized process to monitor and support classroom instruction and to build instructional capacity (see **Finding 3.1**).

Through the analysis of 78 artifacts, the auditors found that 70% aligned to the content of the Ohio Learning Standards. However, when classroom work artifacts were examined for context and cognition, auditors found that only one English language arts artifact utilized higher-order skills, and all subject areas utilized Real World context to a minimal degree (see **Finding 3.2**).

Auditors found the Milton-Union Exempted Village School District does provide professional development, but has no written plan to coordinate all offerings and assure that professional development is effectively improving student learning. Auditors noted

that written direction is needed to ensure that professional development is supporting the district’s vision and assuring that needed content is delivered effectively in district classrooms (see **Finding 3.3**).

“We do not have a core curriculum at the elementary level.”— Building Administrator

Focus Area 4: Feedback

The key emphasis of **Focus Area Four** is on soliciting feedback on student learning and how the system uses those data. Typically, the information for feedback comes from a variety of student assessments and program evaluation instruments.

The auditors found Milton-Union Exempted Village School District does not have clear written direction to assure comprehensive student assessment and the use of data from those assessments to inform instructional planning. Although the district regularly assesses student achievement, the Milton-Union Exempted Village School District does not have an assessment plan, and district documents do not provide adequate direction for effective student assessment planning (see **Finding 4.1**).

Auditors found a variety of assessments in use in Milton-Union Exempted Village School District, but the scope and alignment of assessment are inadequate to evaluate the effectiveness of the taught curriculum. Overall, the auditors found that English language arts and mathematics are fully assessed in grades K-8, but only 38% of the core courses (K-12) and 9% of the non-core courses (K-12) have common formal

assessments (see **Finding 4.2**). Most of the common assessments in use are not deeply aligned to the Ohio tests.

Focus Area 5: Productivity

Focus Area Five emphasis is on productivity and the relationship between system input and output. A school system with the highest level of productivity is able to demonstrate consistently improved student outcomes, even in the context of diminishing resources.

The auditors found the Milton-Union Exempted Village School District financially sound. However, auditors found financial decision making and budget development do not have any type of cost-benefit analyses and are not adequately linked to program effectiveness to provide maximum educational productivity (see **Finding 5.1**).

Auditors found the Milton-Union Exempted Village School District has moved to a 1:1 environment and has an existing district technology plan that has not been updated to reflect current changes. The lack of an adequate district technology plan has resulted in limited, ineffective use of technology in instructional delivery and student work in all grade levels (see **Finding 5.2**).



“

“I would love to have one person in charge of the curriculum K-12 to help with vertical alignment.” (District Administrator)

“Curriculum is not brought to the board. The curriculum has not changed over the past five years.” (Board Member)

“We need to have consistency in what is expected in instruction.” (Teacher)

“The district has no developed or adopted curriculum that I am aware of.” (Building Administrator)

“We have not worked on improving professional development.” (Building Administrator)

“There is no uniform grading policy for teachers.” (Building Administrator)

“We have great technology, but there are only two techs in the whole district to work on technology for the district. They are overwhelmed.” (Teacher)

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Key Recommendations

The auditors are confident that this audit report will provide the foundation for improvement efforts. However, future progress will depend, in part, on the district leadership's efforts to make the tough decisions incorporated in the audit recommendations, including the willingness of the governing board to allocate additional resources necessary to implement the recommendations.

1

Develop and implement a comprehensive, multi-year plan that establishes the district's vision and expectations and that implements the recommendations in this report.

2

Improve management of district resources and overall accountability through quality board policies and a coordinated organizational structure.

3

Develop and implement quality written curriculum and aligned formative assessments for all content areas taught at all grade levels, guided by a comprehensive curriculum management plan.

4

Develop and implement a district staff development plan that focuses on growth among all employees based on annual district student achievement goals.

5

Revise and implement the district technology plan to enhance student learning and staff productivity.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Develop a comprehensive, multi-year implementation plan that addresses the findings and recommendations contained in the Curriculum Audit™ report. Align district decisions and actions toward closing gaps identified in the audit findings.

The Curriculum Audit™ report is a comprehensive document that details the current state of the Milton-Union Exempted Village School District. In order to best move the district forward, district officials need to create an implementation model that focuses all district efforts on desired outcomes in a multi-year plan. This first step is imperative toward achieving the overall district goal of achieving equity and requires appropriate funding allocations within a clear, concise policy framework.

“We need to work on our scope and sequence. The three buildings are connected, but we are not really connected; we all do our own thing.”—Building Administrator

Recommendation 2:

Establish and maintain adequate control over curriculum management with adoption and implementation of curriculum management related board policies and administrative guidelines. Create/revise and maintain an organizational chart and job descriptions that meet the principles of sound organizational management.

The role of a governing board is to establish and maintain control of the foundation of the

district’s work. Well-written policies assure long-term stability of the foundation. Additionally, an organizational chart that conforms to the principles of sound organizational management and job descriptions with clear linkages to duties and evaluation measures are critical to support the goals of the district. Planning and well-written plans coordinated throughout the district provide district leadership with control of district direction and decision making.

“There is no formal process to identify the best technological academic programs to be used in classes. Teachers just select what they want.”—District Administrator

Recommendation 3:

Develop and implement a comprehensive curriculum management plan that coordinates and prioritizes all curriculum management functions and tasks in the district. Develop curriculum guidelines with clear expectations for rigor in instruction as well as in student materials and resources for both core and non-core courses. Develop, adopt, and implement aligned, formative, and diagnostic assessments at all levels to monitor student learning continuously and to inform individualized, differentiated, and effective instruction.

Quality curriculum planning requires a comprehensive curriculum management plan and written curriculum documents to focus the system on efforts to achieve a quality, deeply aligned curriculum with strong delivery and evaluation components. A curriculum management plan provides for instructional resources, strategies, and assessments aligned to the content, context, and cognitive type

for each objective taught. The curriculum management plan should be directed by school board policies and administrative guidelines that delineate processes for curriculum development and review, roles and responsibilities of staff, and procedures for implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the district curriculum.

“We do not use data to guide our instruction. There is no guidance, support, or monitoring for K-5 assessments.”— District Administrator

Recommendation 4:

Develop a district staff development plan that incorporates an emphasis on growth in curriculum design and delivery, effective classroom strategies that align with district expectations, and ongoing professional growth among all employees focused on annual district student achievement goals.

Building capacity for teachers and district/building administrators is essential to continued improvement of teaching and learning for school districts. A comprehensive professional development plan is necessary to accomplish the intended purpose of improving performance and achieving desired student achievement outcomes. Monitoring instructional delivery is a key component of the improvement process for teachers, providing authentic evaluation of professional learning efforts through teacher demonstration via on-the-job application. An effective district has a comprehensive professional development plan, focused professional development opportunities related to district goals, an expectation that new learnings will be utilized in the classroom,

ongoing instructional monitoring to determine fidelity of delivery, and targeted evaluation to determine if the professional learning is achieving desired outcomes.

Recommendation 5:

Revise and implement a district technology plan that supports the management and equitable use of instructional technology across the district and enhances student learning and staff productivity. Clearly identify expectations for technology usage in classrooms, and provide adequate professional development and oversight to ensure implementation and links to student learning.

Technology is ever evolving, and, as such, a school district’s technology plan must be frequently updated. A revised, updated district technology plan ensures that district resources are allocated appropriately according to guidelines to ensure that technology is not outdated or ineffective. Furthermore, an updated district technology plan helps prepare students for future college and career opportunities. In order to fully utilize available technology, professional development must also be delivered so staff can move from simply using technology as a substitute for traditional methods to augmenting, modifying, and finally redefining what learning can occur with new tools and techniques.





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