RPS RICHMOND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

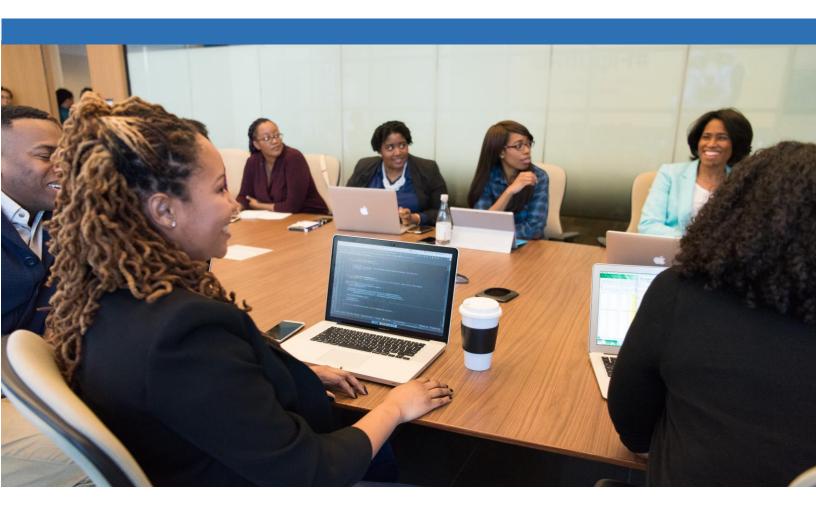# Improving Central Office Data Use at Richmond Public Schools

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Honor Statement
On my honor as a student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment.

Mandatory Disclaimer
The author conducted this study as part of the program of professional education at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, University of Virginia. This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the course requirements for the Master of Public Policy degree. The judgments and conclusions are solely those of the author, and are not necessarily endorsed by the Batten School, by the University of Virginia, or by any other agency.

Executive Summary

RPS is an urban school division in Virginia that strives to promote equity and student and excellence as outlined in their Dreams4RPS Strategic Plan. Data use is considered a key component of decision-making at the school division-level, especially as it plays a key part in determining academic plans and goals in the education sphere. However, the challenge of adapting to new technological transitions to improve customer service has placed burdens on a central office not yet equipped to fully embrace these modern changes. This poses a challenge as to how data use can be increasingly incorporated into Central Office so it can serve schools to its full capacity.

Inability to address the lack of data use within Central Office has repercussions in its ability to service schools effectively and provide resources for efficient decision-making. Ultimately, RPS Central Office can improve upon its current data-use culture by providing more technological support to better prepare their end users for adoption and implementation. Additionally, insufficient Talent Office exit data collection for human resources management and the lack of standardized upkeep of archival data for all offices poses concerns to the division's goals for Strategic Priority 5: Modern Systems and Infrastructure.

This report identifies three alternatives supported by qualitative and quantitative evidence that aim to foster data use within the Central Office by targeting varying levels of end users:
1. **Quarterly Professional Development (PD) Opportunities for Office Associates**: provide school and central office associates with PD opportunities quarterly during the school year with topics reflecting key division technological software and tools, processes, and best practices.
2. **Improved Employee Exit Process Data Collection**: audit and update personnel information on an annual basis while conducting focus groups on the value of exit surveys and interviews to improve data collection for decision-making.
3. **Office-Specific Archival Data**: each Office, or department must come up with their informal policies around process documentation and "employee-turnover proof" data creation relevant to the functions and projects of their Office

These alternatives were evaluated as to how they held up to the selected criteria relevant to the values of RPS: cost, effectiveness, and ease of implementation. Among these alternatives, the report recommends **quarterly PD opportunities for Office Associates,** a crucial end-user base located in every school and office, and was selected given the demand from office associates for training and low costs given the expected effectiveness in knowledge sharing.

Introduction

The central office is defined as the local governmental bureaucracy that sits hierarchically above the school (Honig, 2013). Literature on central office reveals the important role it plays in helping school divisions by providing leadership and the synergies that arise (Sheppard et al., 2009). More often than not, central offices are regarded as burgeoning bureaucracy, a sentiment that is widely shared among school communities and are viewed as archaic, or slow to invest in technology and systems that can integrate and expedite many organizational processes (Honig, 2013).

Mounting use of data in school divisions, or "evidence-based decision making" have primarily revolved around academics, such as measuring teacher effectiveness or student achievement

(Honig & Venkateswaran, 2015). Despite these heightened data collection efforts, there is a lack of consistency across central office departments as this data gets analyzed and utilized for decision-making to varying degrees. This highlights a need for central offices at the school division-level to implement data-use practices in order to better adapt to data-driven school practices and decision-making. Richmond Public Schools is no exception to this—since 2023, their ongoing ERP implementation efforts revealed unique challenges that the central office staff face surrounding organizational data collection and utilization practices and technological workforce development for their end users.

This report identifies current areas of improvement for RPS Central Office and the data-use practices that can be implemented to address these challenges. These areas of improvement range in the number of end users it influences at various levels of the central office. This product provides an overview of the problem in the context of the division's strategic priorities. The report then reviews evidence of potential policy alternatives that are evaluated against the selected criteria—cost, effectiveness, and ease of implementation. The report selects a recommendation among the alternatives based on evaluations and finally concludes with next steps for implementation that RPS can take.

Problem Statement

Central Office at Richmond Public Schools (RPS) must improve upon its current data-use in order to improve existing organizational operations and strategies to effectively serve their schools. One of RPS Dreams4RPS Strategic Priorities, Priority 5: Modern Systems and Infrastructure aims to "modernize and better integrate core technology systems to provide a better level of customer service…and to allow for data-driven decision-making" (RPS, 2018). A rich data-use culture is the prime environment in which these new technology systems are integrated and requires a developed workforce that can adapt to these emerging challenges.

The recent roll-out of the enterprise resource planning (ERP) system that integrates the financial, accounting, and human resources systems of the school division demonstrates the effect of technological shifts and the immediate demands required of end users (personal communication, January 12). Central office and non-teaching school-based staff—the end users and stakeholders dealing with the brunt force of these changes—face certain challenges: **how can RPS better support their central office staff who will be facing more modernized forms of technology and data-use in their day-to-day work? How can central office staff be more well-equipped with technological readiness skills to adapt to a rich data-use culture that the division is simultaneously attempting to foster?**

Client Overview

Richmond Public Schools (RPS) is a public school division of the independent city of Richmond that serves approximately 20,000 pre-K to 12th grade students across five preschools, three specialty schools, 25 elementary schools, including one charter school, seven middle schools, and five high schools (RPS, n.d.). Their 2023-2024 annual operating budget is $524.3 million (RPS, 2023a). The urban school division is made up of a diverse student body that identifies primarily as students of color, where 60.5 percent identifies as Black and 25 percent identifies as Hispanic in the 2022-2023 school year (VDOE, 2024).

Their three core values of equity, engagement, and excellence all drive RPS's mission to create learning opportunities for their students to fight against systemic injustices and institutionalized racism (RPS, n.d.). In 2018, the Dreams4RPS 2018-2023 Strategic Plan revealed five strategic priorities that impact the school community, students, teachers, and staff and are aligned with their values (RPS, 2018). Most to all of these priorities directly involve academic outcomes for students and teachers (i.e., accreditation, graduation rates, etc.) with the implication that these goals will be attained through the policies and agendas set out by the division (RPS, 2018).

The only explicit mentioning of central office and their potential contributions to these goals is Priority 5 in regards to improving customer service with their schools and Goal 6: Satisfaction. The Central Office is made up of seven departments or "Offices": the Academic Office, Talent Office, Office of the Superintendent, Student Wellness, Engagement, and Operations (RPS, n.d.). In October 2023, the Data and Systems Administration Team from the Talent Office launched the ERP system that aims to modernize and integrate their existing technological systems. As RPS outlines their next priorities with the development of a new Dreams4RPS Strategic Plan, the school division should consider developing a holistic focus on publicly defining the roles and functions of the central office that are aligned to reach certain goals and priorities. This will ultimately highlight upon existing synergies of schools and the central office as a single learning organizational unit.

RPS has historically experienced financial constraints at the state and local level. The passed 2025 fiscal year budget includes a total increase in expenditure of $38 million, in which the majority of the funding will go towards raises for teachers and staff and facility repairs (Gonzalez, 2024). However, this budget process is still ongoing as the division awaits approval from City Council. This funding still remains tight for central office and has overall implications for the types of alternatives that are considered in this report. All of the offered policy alternatives are defined as relatively "low cost", especially as these costs deal with sunk costs, or expenditures that can be flexibly accounted for within central office based on the allocated fiscal year budgeting for each Office.

Background on the Problem

Data use in the context of this report implies the role that data can drive decision-making, which can be applied in varying contexts at the school division level. For instance, the Academic Office and schools can utilize data to create goals for instructional improvement, while the Talent Office can make talent management decisions for teachers and staff (Grissom et al., 2017). Central office is recognized as an essential player in improving data use through the provision of system support, but effectiveness surrounding how to provide such system support has yet to be discovered (Farrell, 2015).

There are multiple factors that contribute to Richmond Public Schools data-use culture. Although these are certainly not definitive of the problem of lack of data-use culture within Central Office, these were largely observed within the division impacting staff at various levels and attributed to data-use: from its collection, analysis, and creation. The three areas of improvement identified include the following: employee technological adoption and implementation, lack of data collection, and inconsistent data archival practices adopted by each Office.

Employee Technology Adoption and Implementation
In October 2023, the Data Systems and Administration Team launched LINQ ERP with the plan to integrate the division's financial and accounting (FAS) and their human resources (HR) systems. This represents a large technological overhaul of the AS400 system that was utilized within the division since 1992 (Andrew Bishop, personal communication, January 5, 2024). This software transition presented itself with many implementation challenges, particularly around initial reception and software use training from the end users, or office associates.

Each Richmond Public Schools school, program, and office is staffed with at least one Office Associate (OA) role that is responsible for a wide array of administrative functions: front office management, student record and data processing and management, and school-level purchasing oversight (Hostetter, 2023). The creation of these roles are mandated per Virginia Standards of Quality, where school-based clerical personnel have determined ratios dependent on the number of students in a school and the education level: for example, one full-time clerical personnel for every 300 students at the elementary school-level (Virginia Law, 2022). In the RPS context, OAs are predominately women of color, with an average tenure of 12 years (Hostetter, 2023). As many of these OAs have been deeply-rooted with an archaic system, a resistance towards embracing new changes at the division-level is naturally evident.

However, survey data collection and interviews with OAs at the division-level reveal the extent to which OAs lack "the requisite skills to perform at a high level in a rapidly changing and modernizing school system" (Hostetter, 2023). Table 1 represents results from the Office Associate Experience Survey that indicates that OAs recognize a need for professional development (PD) for their given job role. The results indicate OAs' need for PD regardless of experience in the job position. Additionally, the author cites observations by central office staff and school leadership concerning skill deficits and the lack of knowledge on utilization of essential tools, procedures, and best practices (Hostetter, 2023). Insights from this report highlight a knowledge gap that ranges among OA staff within schools and the Central Office, an end-user base that will be expected to increasingly adapt to modernizing school systems.

Table 1. Importance of Professional Development by Tenure

Category	0-1 Years (n=12)	2-5 Years (n=16)	6-10 Years (n=19)	11-20 Years (n=17)	21+ Years (n=28)	Total (n=109)
Professional Development	58.3%	31.3%	25.0%	54.5%	40.0%	41.9%

Source: Hostetter, L. (2023).

Lack of Data Collection for Talent Management Decisions
RPS distributes two exit surveys to employees exiting the division based on their roles: teachers receive the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium (MERC) exit survey and the RPS Exit Survey that is aligned to VDOE requirements (Clemmons, 2024). The latter survey data has only

been collected recently in the 2022-2023 school year and are sent to all teachers and staff division-wide. Exit interviews are also offered to employees leaving the system, but there is overall low uptake rate—only 24 employees participated since June 2023 (Clemmons, 2024).

Figure 2 displays a descriptive statistics table of the percent of RPS Exit Survey respondents for all employees. A low survey response rate out of the total number of "employee separations" demonstrates the significance of the problem: 9.6 percent of exiting staff filled out the RPS Exit Survey. Therefore, a knowledge gap exists in the Talent Office's existing data collection procedures. Historically-low survey response rates may reveal the weaknesses of the survey structure itself, the strategy of survey dissemination, and survey-taker incentives (Fincham, 2008). Figure 1. RPS Survey Data (8/23/23 – 2/24/24)

RPS Exit Survey Data for All Employees

Reason for Leaving	% of Respondents who Included Reason in Top 3 Reasons for Leaving (n=19)
Employee Preparation/Support	63%
Culture and Climate (School, Division, Community)	58%
Compensation and Benefits/ Career Advancement	58%
Personal Reasons	42%
Retirement	0%

Note: RPS had 197 separations of employment during this timeframe.

Source: Clemmons, Maggie. (February 24, 2024). Teacher Retention & Exit Information – Update for the Richmond City School Board

Inconsistent Data Archival Practices
With institutional knowledge under threat due to high rates of central office leadership turnover in the unique context of RPS, retaining institutional knowledge is important to the success of the organization. Retention of organizational or institutional knowledge can be placed under threat due to high turnover rates in central office leadership. Without the use of evidence to establish the development of formal, written tools, RPS Central Office loses the opportunity for staff members to "continually draw on incorporated evidence to guide their subsequent choices and actions" (Levitt & March, 1988). Therefore, the consistent use and creation of these evidence, or tools, in the form of archival data is missing.

An effective central office will require office leadership that is oriented towards RPS' strategic priorities, but a continuity of each office's orientation towards these values even when the organization has low leadership retention rates. To ensure continuity in organizational culture and workflow processes, the existence of "employee turnover-proof data" is essential to maintain to serve schools effectively. Employee-turnover proof data describes archival data for an office or department that outlines the workflow processes and standards for the office, along with documents, policies, and internal communications related to projects and work policy updates (Mortensen & Zakhour, 2022). However, interviews with some Office leadership reveal the lack of such standardized policies to uphold office-specific archival data within the central office. Rather, a central office leader recognized the need to implement informal policies on their own accord (personal communication, February 14, 2024).

Consequences of the Problem

Since the identified problems vary in scope and impact on data end users at the central office, the consequences are expected to differ as well. Despite these differences, not addressing these data use problems at the central office will produce complications when providing customer service to schools, thus creating barriers to achieving Strategic Priority 5.

Employee Technology Adoption and Implementation

When considering the first data use problem on employee technology adoption, RPS can expect their customer service processes towards schools to be negatively affected. For instance, there are tangible negative impacts if office associates are not completely familiar with the functions and processes when placing orders with vendors through LINQ FAS software. This can cause delays in schools receiving supplies or tutoring services for students, while the Operations Office may expect delays in paying for facility renovation projects (personal communication, March 26, 2024). Lack of skillsets surrounding technology tool-use such as Google Suite or understanding of best practices in data-keeping may also create more inefficiencies.

Lack of Data Collection for Talent Management Decisions

The strategic value in exit surveys lies in its ability to understand employees' perceptions of the work and their roles and the problems underlying these issues. Without guaranteeing employment exit process data collection and auditing, there is a foregone opportunity to analyze data which prevents key decision makers in the RPS Talent Office from 1) gaining access to data to 2) come to conclusions that can inform ongoing organizational hiring and onboarding practices.

Inconsistent Data Archival Practices

Anecdotes from local news show the consequences of a vacant leadership position to division's ability to provide services to schools in a timely manner—for instance, in 2022, the resignation of chief operating officer had implications for construction projects and operational delays for food services, building maintenance, and other services (Blair, 2022). Central Office may face unique projects grinding to a halt if leadership exits without the necessary preparation and process documentation for staff to function properly in a role vacancy. Interviews with Central Office leaders mentioned the critical role that office archival data-keeping is in the retention of institutional knowledge on important office-specific projects and functions (personal communication, January 5, 2024).

Evidence on Potential Solutions to Improving Organizational Data Use

This section summarizes literature on business organizational and school administration data use practices to shed light on existing data use practices on data use outcomes. Although we cannot make causal inferences from existing research on these identified solutions, the literature nonetheless provides expected insights and outcomes through organizational theory as to whether data use-related outcomes will be realized in the context of RPS.

Professional Development (PD)

The application of high-quality professional development (PD) has typically been primarily promoted for the use of teachers to improve classroom instruction and student achievement (Yoon et al., 2007). However, its implementation poses certain limitations where "single-shot, one day workshops" and lack of coherent infrastructure creates barriers to positive student and teacher PD (Ball & Cohen, 1999).

Recent research that evaluates the effectiveness of PD show mixed results on both measured outcomes of student achievement and teacher practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Among the evidence, studies that indicate positive effects indicate that the extent to the effectiveness of PD depends on its design and hinges on the following characteristics: content-focused, incorporates active learning, supports collaboration, uses models of effective practice, provides coaching and expert support, offers feedback and reflection, and is of sustained duration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Thus, high-quality professional development can be concisely defined as "intensive, sustained, content-focused, coherent, well-defined, and strongly implemented" (Yoon et al., 2007).

This policy alterative can be similarly applied to in the context of the central office: evidence from six urban school districts indicates that professional development and connections to internal expertise around data access are central supports that school leaders can rely on to overcome "barriers to action" to data-use (Grissom et al., 2017). Other key supports include a change in institutional procedures and building a data use culture that holds school leaders accountable (Grissom et al., 2017). Using a mixed-methods approach, Grissom et al. estimated that school leaders had fewer perceptions of data use barriers when working in systems with high-support systems (2017). When applying this to the context of RPS, PD can act as a form of central office support for data use at the principal and office associate (OA) level that can build the necessary technological tools at a "baseline" level. This can then provide guidance on how to navigate and apply data to inform decision-making (Honig & Coburn, 2007; Grissom et al., 2017).

Exit Interview Data Collection and Dissemination Strategies

Employee turnover is associated with both direct and indirect costs to an organization: the estimated cost of undergoing the process to replace an employee can be up to 1.5 to 2.5 times an employee's annual salary and a loss in productivity (Shaw, 2005; Cascio, 2006). Business organizations have relied on exit interviews to better recognize the reasons as to why an employee makes the decision to exit an organization (Spain & Groyberg, 2016).

According to Spain and Groyberg (2016), opportunities for the talent office can be exploited through the employee exit process as well by collecting mandatory exit-interview (EI) data analyzing the data, and sharing analyses to inform decision-making. In a business organizational context, companies end up consolidating the data but are less likely to share it with senior decision makers, thus ignoring the strategic value of exit interviews (Spain & Groyberg, 2016).

The strategic value lies in its ability to understand employees' perceptions of the work and their roles and the problems underlying these issues.

When referring to other school division systems and the research practice partnerships (RPP) guidance on applying survey data to inform decisions, increased organizational learning and development of rich, data-use culture are fostered through these processes. Although most of the data pertained to teachers and teacher retention, such practice partnerships provided key insights into how District of Columbia Public Schools 2015-2018 survey results provide broad implications for how urban school districts could retain high-performing teachers: for example, providing extended leave and part-time employment and opportunities for leadership towards teachers of color were cited as key takeaways (Pennington & Brand, 2018). The study also recommended other data that could be collected to understand retention data. Another example of data application at play is the Ohio Department of Education's (ODE) partnership with the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Program to launch an exit survey in school districts that is now utilizing the statewide survey to learn about exiting teachers (Wackwitz, 2020).

Exit interview or survey data can inform practices in regards to recognizing weaknesses in existing human resource practices such as organizational socialization programming. The use of organizational socialization programs, or use of effective onboarding of new employees is another way to instill the norms and expectations around data use as RPS vies for modern systems and infrastructure in their strategic plan (RPS, 2018). Although institutionalized socialization tactics are associated with employee experience more positive job attitudes, higher levels of fit, and lower turnover levels versus individualized tactics, it is also negatively associated to role innovation (Bauer et al., 2007; Saks, Uggerselv & Fassina, 2007). Individualized tactics that involve employees taking more proactive roles when starting out to figure out company values, norms, and expectations are positively associated with a "positive orientation to one's responsibilities" (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). Therefore, pinpointing areas of improvement through data collection and analysis can be tailored towards mending ongoing HR practices for role clarity and knowledge of RPS culture amongst newly hired employees.

Process Documentation and Archival Data
Process documentation is another form of data-keeping in and of itself where the standardization of production or service processes are consistent and efficient—ultimately minimizing uncertainty and variability of the process (Ungan, 2006). Ultimately, this requires an update in central office procedures and norms for all offices that require district leaders to be more intentional about how they use evidence-use processes and participate in organizational sense-making (Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012). Organizational and knowledge management literature related to non-profits, an industry somewhat adjacent to the public education sector, provides some several pointers on the tools or strategies that can be applied in the RPS context.

Business literature points to the existing organizational and technological barriers that can occur that has implications for how knowledge-sharing practices should encourage "flat and open organizational structures that facilitate transparent knowledge flows, processes and resources that provide a continuous learning organizational culture" (Riege, 2005). Therefore, knowledge management can be acquired in various steps to form a continuous process or cycle: acquisition, codification, storage, retrieval, diffusion and presentation, application, creation (Lettieri et al., 2004). Research on nonprofit organizations pinpointed frequent problems seen for accounting/administrative knowledge and operational or organizational knowledge. For the former, the main issues include risk of loss, an overreliance on paper documents, and low

efficiency which can be solved through technology adoption and database creation to improve knowledge sharing (Lettieri et al., 2024). The latter knowledge area is characteristic of low accessibility of data and information that calls for formalization to internal communication and the creation of an archive for operative data (Lettieri et al., 2004)).

A national survey for Canadian and Australian non-profit organizations (NPOs) indicate that procedural knowledge, or the documented knowledge about processes and procedures deemed vital to the organization's operations in the non-profit sector was considered a crucial knowledge area along with "knowledge about clients/community and [the NPO's] needs" (Rathi et al., 2016). Approximately 80 percent of NPOs in each country rated knowledge about processes and practices as "very important" and "absolutely essential" (Rathi et al., 2016). Therefore, this literature points to the value created in knowledge management and organizational efficiency that can be instilled through the use of technology and tools. More recent literature on nonprofit organizations present a broad range of tools and technologies to inform NPO-adjacent organizations and include document and content management, commercial productivity software, databases and data storage systems, and project management applications for knowledge management (Rathi & Given, 2017).

Policy Alternatives and Criteria for Evaluation

This section outlines the three alternatives—PD opportunities for OAs, improved exit survey data collection processes, and office-specific archival data—modified for success in the context of RPS. Each alternative is evaluated against three criteria: cost, effectiveness, and ease of implementation.

Cost-effectiveness was not directly measured as the latter two alternatives do not have well-defined measurements on improved data use—therefore these two criteria are evaluated separately. However, cost estimates were made based on sunk and opportunity cost assumptions through allocated funding for each Office determined by the approved budget. Any hourly wage numbers to measure opportunity costs required of labor and human capital were calculated from the starting salary of a position listed in the 2023-2024 RPS Salary Schedule (RPS, 2023b).

Effectiveness of an alternative is determined by the targeting level or scope of the expected policy impact. The greater number of Offices and personnel the policy affects, runs the assumption that there is a growth in data-use culture, and thus would be ranked highly in this sub-criterion. Another category that effectiveness considers is whether the policy impact can be measured by RPS to determine how often a product or policy is utilized or referred to.

Ease of implementation gauges buy-in from stakeholders of the alternative, particularly from those in Central Office leadership and those who will be at the receiving end of the policy if implemented. It is also ranked according to whether some semblance of the policy has loosely been implemented within institution, but has yet to be formalized or communicated across Offices as a viable policy.

Alternative 1: Quarterly PD Opportunities for Office Associates

Currently, RPS has no guaranteed or "official" budget allocation towards professional development that is specifically tailored toward central office and school-based staff. Professional development has always been teacher-centered and has been federally funded through Title II, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) where all school divisions are eligible to receive funding for activities that are set aside for instructional coaching, professional learning communities, teacher and principal leadership, mentoring and induction, etcetera (VDOE, n.d.). Office associates are the targeted audience of sustained, high-quality PD. The PD will be sustained in the sense that opportunities will be provided at a quarterly basis. High quality will ensure that content is targeted towards the identified OA needs. This would be determined through a survey.

To expand the existing alternative, having each department allocate a set equal amount of budget from unused budget lines towards a central office PD fund would ensure equity across central office where each office has an equal stake in the organizational learning and professional growth of all staff at RPS. Additionally, having a hired employee take on additional responsibilities such as handling logistics of PD sessions for central office workers and administer pre- and post-session surveys to determine and scope out areas of interest and areas for improvement is another crucial implementation component to consider.

Cost: Low-Medium

In regards to the costs of these programs, there are rough estimates determined by prior PD efforts for office associates previously run by Enrollment, Placement, and Planning and the Data System Administration—teams reporting to the Chief of Staff and the Chief Talent Officer

respectively. Both offices have offered list of expenses they have encountered while implementing these PD sessions for office associates. Leaders from both offices mentioned allocated resources from "unused" office lines, such as the Office Supplies account line to help fund PD. The Supplies and Materials budget for the various offices range from $16,400-61,480.

When evaluating this alternative against the cost criterion, we can estimate that these costs can be classified as "medium", especially as these budgets have already been pre-determined or allocated for the next fiscal year by the Department of Budget. This would be considered a sunk cost, however opportunity costs for such decisions exist as these offices will "lose out" on department-specific opportunities and salary hours if PD efforts are led by other central office staff in-house.

Common PD expenses include printed materials, meal costs, and hourly paid time lost for attending participants and those leading the PD sessions. These costs vary if they occur only annually (once a year or per-session) versus quarterly. Table 2 displays these estimated costs with a broadened scope that is inclusive of all office associates located within the school- (~110 OAs) and office-level (~40 OAs). Table 3 displays these similar costs with a narrower scope of only central office OAs. Table 4 shows the approved budgets for Materials/Supplies for all departments, or "offices" within the central office for the fiscal years (FY) 2023 to 2025 to provide a general sense of how funding can be allocated across departments.

Table 2. Estimated costs (per session and SY) for school-wide and central office OAs

Expenditures	Per Session Cost	SY Costs
Meals	$1,700-2,000	$7,400
Supplies	$180	$720
Office Associate Hourly Rate	$13,000	$52,000
Data Specialist Hourly Rate	$240	$960
TOTAL	$13,420	$61,480

Table 3. Estimated costs for central office OAs ONLY

Expenditures	Per Session Cost	SY Costs
Meals	$460	$1,840
Supplies	$55	$220
Office Associate Hourly Rate	$3400	$13,600
Data Specialist Hourly Rate	$120	$480
TOTAL	$13,420	$16,400

Table 4. Materials/Supplies Funding for each office by FY

Office	FY 22 Budget	FY 23 Budget	FY 24 Budget
Academic	$1,060,347	$1,116,827	$1,176,827
Engagement	$122,200	$127,200	$115,200
Talent	$18,600	$18,600	$19,600
Operations	$1,683,500	$1,977,775	$1,806,175
Superintendent	$79,800	$77,800	$76,200
Student Wellness	$256,550	$287,050	$352,050

Effectiveness: High

When evaluating office associate professional development's and how this might improve a data-use culture, the theory indicates that providing consistent PD and software or technology-use for personnel who are typically left out of the process through the formation of a "community of learning" will directly contribute to a rich data-use culture (Honig, 2014). Based on equity concerns, the recommended format would be quarterly PD opportunities extended to all OAs (school and central office). Its targeting level is thus high and promises a higher realization of the policy's towards a wider base.

The Enrollment, Placement, and Planning team has made such efforts to create regular PD through the availability of self-paced modules, but they, according to the team's director, "lacks teeth" in that there are no requirements or real incentives to participate, thus contributing to the overall low uptake in PD by office associates (personal communication, February 2, 2024). The formatting of the program will necessitate participation and in-person opportunities reiterate the sense of a "community of learning". Ultimately the effectiveness of a consistent, OA-targeted PD ultimately depends on how it is implemented and measuring as to whether it has contributed to improved understanding of software, key processes, and best practices as determined by the division. Therefore, effectiveness can be measured to some effect by gauging OAs receptiveness and satisfaction with the quality of PD provided. School and central office leaders will also be less notified regarding late invoice payments, item deliveries, or overall concerns on whether staff have the requisite skillset needed to get administrative tasks done effectively.

Ease of Implementation: Low-medium

Iterations of in-person PD have been implemented in the past that were previously organized by Talent and Enrollment, thus indicating some semblance of administrative feasibility as there is a recognized need for OA PD. Additionally, conversations with OAs indicate a demand for PD (Hostetter, 2023; personal communication, February 15, 2024) However, creating a systematic, consistent, in-person option of professional development poses a feasibility and implementation challenge, especially as there is no mandate for each department to allocate these funds for central office-centered PD. Evidence on PD cites implementation as a long-standing challenge to effectiveness (Penuel et al., 2007).

Despite high buy-in for OA participants, feasibility will ultimately be dependent on the scope in which the policy is implemented. Another implementation barrier is the logistical ability to pull out office associates for training from their schools. According to the Virginia Standards of Quality, school-based clerical personnel have determined ratios dependent on the number of students in a school and the education level: for example, one full-time clerical personnel for every 300 students (VDOE, n.d.). In the RPS context, smaller schools tend to have only one OA, while larger schools have more than one. As a result, anecdotes regarding organizing prior OA trainings explain the difficulty in pulling out office associates and arranging communication with school leaders (personal communication, January 5, 2024). As a result, expanding OA training to all OAs in schools and central office will pose logistical problems. However, offering training to only central office OAs will pose equity issues. With these short run complications, the alternative ranks "low-medium" when evaluated against the administrative feasibility criterion.

To note, a long-term alternative that RPS can opt for is offering professional development as a key budget item before the School Board in the budget proposal for the central office. Given the current Board's and public opinion of central office as a form of "bloated bureaucracy", currying favor for funding may not be administratively feasible, but is a policy alterative to consider given

the expected positive returns from PD in learning and efficiency within the organization (Sears, 2019).

Alternative 2: Improved Employee Exit Process Data Collection
Given the low exit survey and exit interview response and take-up rates respectively, this may be a result of survey fatigue, a lack of incentives, or communication challenges (Saleh & Bista, 2017). The RPS Talent Office should consider directing their time and resources to understanding general sentiments teachers and staff may have surrounding the uptake process by conducting small focus groups.

Incentivizing the surveys can take a "nudge" approach by using language within the survey prompt that engages a sense of community, anonymity, or a sense that the organization takes their feedback seriously for the survey-taker (Fan & Yan, 2010; Trespalacios & Perkins, 2016). A more hardline approach to this policy would entail mandating employee exit process data collection in writing an employee contract and outlining its importance during the onboarding and offboarding process. However, this poses a threat to anonymity and thus survey quality issues (Smith, 2007).

When taking on a more tailored approach to communication, codifying and auditing personnel records on an annual basis is essential for ensuring the receipt of online, mailed surveys (and reminder communications). This would require the division to send automatic annual "personnel updates", similar to those seen for university students in their student portal sites where annual student information updates (i.e., telephone, address, email address, emergency contacts, etc.) are required (UVA Student Affairs, n.d.; VCU Office of the University Registrar, n.d.). The proposed alternative—guaranteeing employment exit process data collection and auditing—addresses the gap in data-use that is currently found within the RPS Talent Office.

Cost: Medium
After participating in a research practice partnership (RPP) with MERC in 2020 that aimed to develop a common exit survey with localized relevance, increase response rates, and inform future data collection, the tools to measure and collect data in the form of a survey were made available for conducting and analysis (Naff et al., 2022). However, extra human resources and staffing such increased roles for data specialist or intern position in the Data and Systems Administration Team will need to be recruited to take on these increased responsibilities. The typical annual salary of a 260-day full-time (8-hour per day) is $62,001 according to the FY 24 salary schedule (RPS, n.d.). Additional staffing can be tasked to take on survey responsibilities, continuing the RPP with MERC on best practices, and furthering this report's work on how to improve survey response and exit interview take-up rates.

Another sunk cost to consider is the possibility of consulting with the current LINQ ERP or TalentEd contractors to lead in collecting and integrating annual personnel record updates. As these costs have already been incurred and allocated for within the Talent Office's fiscal year budget, there will be no additional costs incurred. However, these increased responsibilities to communicate annual update forms with teachers and staff division-wide and manually updating revisions will involve opportunity costs of Talent Office employee's salaried time. Given an annual project timeline of 20 days for a 260-day Talent Associate to audit division-wide personnel information and a data specialist to devote one eight-hour day per week to survey planning and research, these annual labor costs are projected to be $15,472.

Role	Annual Salary	Hourly Rate	Total Costs
Talent Associate (260 day)	$39,968	$19.22	$3,075.20
Data Specialist (260 day)	$62,001	$29.80	$12,396.80
		Total Annual Cost	$15,472

Effectiveness: Low-Medium

Collecting and the routine auditing to ensure accuracy of employee data will ensure that important information will be disseminated if the Talent Office has the proper messaging and communications channels set up to encourage the survey and exit interview participation rates. Although application of data is another fundamental step towards promoting a rich, data-use culture at RPS, it still requires a large enough sample to point trends and create action steps that the district could take in terms of onboarding or human resource management to be effective. Since this data collection is only relevant to exiting employees,

Not only is collection and routine auditing of personnel data important, but the routine quantitative and qualitative analysis of survey and interview results are also crucial for decision making. Therefore, the policy's effectiveness in promoting data use is limited to the Talent Office rather than having wide-spanning data-use cultural changes in all offices. Hence, for target level, the policy ranks low for sub-criterion. When considering whether this policy has tangible and measurable effects, this policy ranks medium as evidence from other school divisions indicate that tangible work products are created as a result of survey data analysis, but limited research is available as to whether these have been applied to actual decision-making. Rather, the long timelines for these changes to be reflected in improvements in existing policies also render this policy alternative to be low (Spain & Groysberg, 2016). Nonetheless, this alternative has potential to help decision-making and improve accuracy in how the survey disseminated and the data is collected.

Ease of Implementation: Medium-High

Implementing a systematic personnel record update or an employment recordkeeping audit may require additional responsibilities added on top of the Talent Office's current practices. The lack of exit survey take-up has already been recognized by the Chief Talent Officer as a problem that needs to be addressed—this indicates leadership buy-in. Despite the implications of adding responsibilities to existing job positions, the Talent Office ultimately recognizes the importance in keeping accurate personnel records as the inability to do so will result in consequences involving payroll (personal communication, June 13, 2023). Additionally, updated records directly relate to the exit survey information as having accurate, up-to-date records ensures the viability in having that exit survey information being sent to accessible locations at the very least. As communications with the LINQ ERP vendor are still active, this can determine the overall feasibility of integration of automated personnel information update forms with the new HRS system.

Alternative 3: Office-Specific Archival Data

When applying the idea of process and workflow documentation to the Talent Office, the Data and System Administration team handles the operations and implementation of the FAS system. The team fully recognizes the issues that may occur if members of the team were to leave the organization in the future, and are in the midst of legacy document creation—a process that requires team members to record important information related to the operations of the software (personal communication, January 5, 2024; personal communication, February 14, 2024).

Creating a sound method of process documentation through informal, Office-specific policies will help central office leadership retain institutional knowledge.

Internal documentation can take many forms: reference documentation that educates teams on important processes, topics, and policies. Since online documentation is already being done to some extent per Office, particularly for team documentation that involves project plans, team schedules, status reports, and meeting minutes, this can be feasible (Atlassian, n.d.). Some teams rely on internal documentation to a greater extent, but two central office leaders remarked that when entering their positions at RPS they couldn't rely on any archival data as such documentation was nonexistent: they later took it upon themselves to recognize the value of these processes to spearhead these projects (personal communication, January 5, 2024; personal communication, February 14, 2024).

Cost: Medium

The estimated costs for the upkeep and maintenance of the actual documents themselves are expected to be minimal. Since these documents will be held in a shared online storage space or a RPS Google Drive folder shared within an Office, there will be little to no costs related to data or record storage. The creation of documentation will require a number of salary hours for staff members in offices that hold key institutional knowledge and are involved with a number of the Office's projects and tasks. Meetings with upper management will be required to constantly revise and reiterate. The expected opportunity cost of labor for existing positions to take on the added responsibilities of an archival historian will be ranked as "low" per Office. However, when looking at this from the central office perspective, these costs will be multiplied per office and may come out to be substantial. Working with the assumption that upkeep and creation of relevant archival data will require 2-4 hours per work week from full-time salaried positions, the annual costs are projected to be $5,400-8,500 per Office. If this were to be applied to each Office, these labor costs would be magnified to be $37,800-59,500. A table with detailed figures are available below:

Role	Annual Salary	Hourly Rate	Total Costs (2-hr)	Total Costs (4-hr)
Specialist (260 day)	$62,001	$29.80	$3,099.20	$6,198.40
Manager (260 day, 1-hr)	$91,604	$44.04	$2,290.10	$2,290.10
		Total Annual Cost	$5,389.30	$8,488.50

Effectiveness: Low-Medium

When ranked against the sub-criterion of targeting level, this alternative ranks as "medium" because it mandates that each Office and the teams within the Office to come up with their own relevant process documentation. Therefore, the scope for this alternative reaches a wider number of internal stakeholders in central office and can improve each office's onboarding or workflow process efficiency. When determining whether this policy's effects are measurable, RPS administration can count the number of times an employee refers to these documents for planning and onboarding purposes. Predicted outcomes as a result of mandated internal documentation is overall workflow efficiency due to the availability of a common processes resource, baseline

onboarding, and the promotion knowledge sharing through data creation and use (Atlassian, n.d.). Although the use of archival data is expected to improve the efficiency of central office, there are no direct ways to measure how effective archival data availability is, especially since many of the benefits that arise from investing in Office-wide archival data will be delayed due to the long feedback implementation of the alternative to realize associated benefits.

Ease of Implementation: Medium

Ease of implementation and administrative feasibility will ultimately depend on whether the leadership on each time would find it worth investing their time, attention, and resources towards process documentation. Specifically, there might be lack of buy-in from larger offices such as the Academic Office due to its large size and many sub-divisions within the organization, but also due to the leadership defaulting to time heuristics when this alternative is presented to them. Rather than comprehending the intangible benefits that are bound to be reaped by the Office in a later time period, the immediate, tangible costs are conjured in the mind first. This results in a natural reluctance to participate in the internal documentation process, and can only be intensified with an Office size that is objectively bigger than the others and more personnel.

If there is wide acceptance of process documentation, implementation of this alternative should be manageable and flexible so that it fits the niche needs and functions of each department. This alternative was not ranked as low since some departments like the Data and Systems Administration and Enrollment, Placement, and Planning team have taken such internal documentation projects upon themselves in a shared team archive for future reference.

Outcomes Matrix and Recommendation

	Criterion 1: Cost	Criterion 2: Effectiveness	Criterion 3: Ease of implementation
Quarterly Professional Development Opportunities for Office Associates	Central office-only: **Low** Central office and school: **Medium**	Targeting level: **High** Tangible and Measurable benefits: **High**	Buy-in: **High** Central office-only feasibility: **High** Central office and school feasibility: **Medium**
Improved Employee Exit Interview Data Collection	Central office-wide: **Medium**	Targeting level: **Low** Tangible and Measurable Benefits: **Medium**	Buy-in: **High** Central office-only feasibility: **Medium**
Office-specific Archival Data	Central office-wide: **Medium**	Targeting level: **Medium** Tangible and Measurable Benefits: **Low**	Buy-in: **Medium** Central office-only feasibility: **Medium**

Based on the evaluations made for each alternative against the selected criteria, the recommended policy alternative is for the division to provide professional development opportunities for central office workers, particular those in office associate roles. Out of all the alternatives considered, its effectiveness had the widest scope as it reached a greater number of staff that were both school- and central office-based. Secondly, this alternative would have more tangible outcomes with shorter timelines to realize these benefits due to follow-up surveys that can measure the effectiveness of PD sessions. Although this recommended alterative ranked "medium" in terms of costs due to the opportunity costs of salaried time, school's OA reliance, and supply budget, these costs are outweighed by the estimated effectiveness of sustained, high-quality nature of the PD opportunities.

All three alternatives address different aspects of the central office's data-use culture with their respective positive outcomes. By proposing this alternative that aims to bolster those in office associate roles, these policies miss out on improving the exit survey strategy of the Talent Office and unstandardized internal documentation processes within the central office. However, these alternatives can be implemented within the division's informal policies to some degree over time as these alternatives take advantage of sunk costs and medium to high feasibility and buy-in.

Implementation Considerations

This section provides some guidance that the division can refer to in order to support their quarterly PD opportunities for OAs implementation efforts. These steps can inform decision-making on how this policy can be implemented in RPS's long-term agenda.

Stage 1: Summer 2024 - Identify and gauge funding buy-in from other offices and schools
Regarding next steps that RPS must take to bring OA professional development into fruition, discussions will have to be brought to leadership meetings to propose quarterly 2-4 hours of PD for OAs as an important opportunity to invest in and the benefits that can be incurred as a result of this alternative. Conversations will need to also address how funding can be divided in order to allocate funding proportionally to the number of office associates each Office employs. Additionally, negotiating with school leaders on appropriate days and times within the academic schedule that OAs are available should give RPS a general sense to the extent to which OAs can regularly attend PD. This will determine how many PD days per year central office can hold and thus the estimated funding allocated for these sessions.

Stage 2: Summer 2024 - Delineation of Roles and Responsibilities
PD that is centered around "data-use culture" for office associates (OAs) should be led jointly by staff members of the Data Systems and Administration (DSA) Team in the Talent Office, the Enrollment, Placement, and Planning Team in the Chief of Staff Office, and the Professional Learning Office in the Academics Office. The former two teams have had prior experience working closely with office associates by providing data software and enrollment training sessions. These teams have greater experience in logistics and planning of PD sessions, and have worked closely with OAs in the past. The Professional Learning team is in charge of teacher professional development and could be a good resource to refer to when planning curriculum for these sessions.
Additional roles and responsibilities to oversee PD will be required to make necessary logistical planning and communications, while reporting updates frequently to leadership.

Stage 3: Fall 2024 - Quarterly OA Professional Development Launch
Routine PD take-up is expected to be high since OAs have highly demanded for some in-person office associate training and calendar dates will be blocked off for these PD events. Surveys need to be administered pre- and post-PD session to gather evidence on what sort of PD topics are of most interest to office associates and general feedback on the sessions themselves. This is a method in which the staff members charged with leading PD can receive a channel of communication and feedback that can be tailored into the implementation revision process and measure effectiveness through approval ratings. For the OAs, or the main recipients of this policy alternative, this survey will serve as a formalized process in which they can provide feedback and express buy-in and satisfaction.

Conclusion

An effective central office is one that operates as a "learning organization" and serves schools so that they are consistently producing effective teaching and learning (Honig, 2008; Moffit, 2009). RPS is an urban school division that strives to promote equity and student excellence as outlined in their Dreams4RPS Strategic Plan. Additionally, data use is considered a key component of decision-making at the school division-level, particularly in regards to academics. However, the challenge of adapting to new technological transitions to improve customer service has placed burdens on a central office not yet equipped to fully embrace these changes. This poses a challenge as to how data use can be increasingly incorporated into Central Office so it can serve schools to its full capacity.

Three evidence- and theory-based alternatives were considered to address possible areas of data use that the district can foster to better serve their schools and promote efficiency within the office. Although all of these alternatives are viable and can be adapted by Central Office to some extent, this report recommends quarterly professional development training for office associates as the optimal choice given its estimated high effectiveness in achieving immediate, positive returns, and its low to medium burden this policy would exact on the RPS budget and implementation process.

In the past, RPS has already offered PD to office associates to some limited capacity. However, broadening its scope in a periodic, sustained manner can help train staff with the requisite skills to take on data-tangential tasks and a rich data-use culture that the division is cultivating that will ultimately serve their respective schools and offices effectively.

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