

Educational consultants tasked with turning around Gadsden County High School

MAY 18, 2018

At a special workshop May 14, the Gadsden County School Board voted to enter into a provisional contract with an educational consulting agency it may have to allow to be Gadsden County High School's external operator next school year.

Gadsden County School Superintendent Roger Milton said that as part of Gadsden County's High School Turnaround Plan this past year, the district signed a contract last summer with The Rensselaerville Institute for that agency to be an educational consultant to the school.

The Rensselaerville Institute is an educational consulting agency and external operator of schools located in Delmar, N.Y. Gadsden County High School had been designated a low-performing school by the state of Florida for this 2017-18 school year due to numerous previous failing state assessments.

Milton said the Gadsden County School Board has been pleased with the work of The Rensselaerville Institute so far this year and wants to continue its relationship with the agency in any case. Should Gadsden County High School get a "C" rating or above when the school assessments come out in July, The Rensselaerville Institute will remain a consulting agency to the school.

However, if Gadsden County High gets a rating below a "C" in July, the district will have to begin using The Rensselaerville Institute as the external operator of the school rather than merely a consulting agency.

"There are a plethora of educational consultants that help turn around schools and/or work as external operators," Milton said. "We were impressed with the Rensselaerville Institute and have continued to appreciate their work with us here in Gadsden County."

"That's why we have agreed to a provisional contract to use them as the external operator of Gadsden County High School should we have to go that route when the school ratings come out in July," Milton continued.

Gillian Williams, president of The Rensselaerville Institute, said her nonprofit organization is very picky about the schools and school districts it chooses to work with.

"We want to make sure we can be successful in all the partnerships we take on," Williams said. "We hope, of course, that Gadsden County High School makes it off the state list of failing schools, but we are prepared to step in with more resources if it doesn't."

"We've learned about the school that there are a lot of people working hard to put in a lot of effort to help students, but they perhaps need a little more guidance in how to work smarter to get the job done," Williams said. "We have a good track record of helping schools like this in similar situations."

The Rensselaerville Institute presented the following overview of their school turnaround plan at the May 14 school board meeting:

GENERAL APPROACH

Under the Core Turnaround Program:

The Rensselaerville Institute has sought to:

- Serve as a catalyst for change by building the capacity of school leaders and teachers engage in a three- to five-year partnership with the principal and school leadership team to intervene through training, conferences, regular site visits and virtual support.

Under the External Operator Partnership:

The Rensselaerville Institute will:

- Endeavor to remove the school from the state's list of failing schools.
- Supervise the school's staff and leadership.
- Build the capacity of the school's leadership and staff through intensive daily training, coaching and support.
- Enter into a five-year partnership with the school and gradually release it to local leadership.
- Create an equal partnership with the school district to support leading change at Gadsden County High School.
- Provide on-the-ground support through an "in-residence" lead principal.
- Have local level control through the school leadership structure, but include mutual consent with the district around major decisions.

STAFFING & SUPERVISION

Under the Core Turnaround Program:

The Rensselaerville Institute has sought to:

- Have an advisory role on personnel assignments and hiring.
- Accept no formal supervision of leaders or teachers.
- Assess leaders' capacity for leading a school turnaround.

Under the External Operator Partnership:

The Rensselaerville Institute will:

- Have the primary responsibilities for the day-to-day running of the school.
- Determine, in collaboration with the district, staffing based upon readiness and capacity criteria.
- Hire new staff, as appropriate, and develop new pipelines for teachers and leaders.
- Establish relationships with higher education institutions for the school's teacher and leader pool.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Under the Core Turnaround Program:

The Rensselaerville Institute has sought to:

- Pass on the Successful Classrooms model of helpful feedback to teachers.
- Provide training and ongoing support to school leaders.
- Provide training and support to district leaders to support the school's turnaround.

Under the External Operator Partnership:

The Rensselaerville Institute will:

- Provide training and ongoing support to school leaders and teachers.
- Provide training and support to district leaders to support durable change.
- Develop intensive curriculum training modules.
- Support rigorous professional learning communities.
- Hire a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math curriculum and teaching expert.
- Hold a summer professional development academy for teachers and leaders.
- Undergo ongoing teacher training on core modules and the use of data to inform instruction.

STRUCTURES & RESOURCES

Under the Core Turnaround Program:

The Rensselaerville Institute has sought to:

- Align resources, diagnosis and data and use strategies in place to make changes to schedules, data structures, etc. to increase student outcomes.
- Assess current assets and resources and make recommendations to better align them to student outcomes.

Under the External Operator Partnership:

The Rensselaerville Institute will:

- Assess the current organizational structure's impact on student outcomes and make realignments to maximize impact.
- Assess the school and district's current assets and resources and align them to student outcomes.

COMMUNITY

Under the Core Turnaround Program:

The Rensselaerville Institute has sought to:

- Use a message and branding strategy to convey a shift in the school's approach and new direction

Under the External Operator Partnership:

The Rensselaerville Institute will:

- Seek the engagement of students in Community Sparkplug projects for community-service credit and college-and-career readiness pathways.
- Implement Community Sparkplug projects to engage key people to drive change at the local level.

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