The role of office manager is not one of the primary assignments or the attractive responsibilities of the principalship. Individuals receive little or no preparation for this role as they move from the classroom through graduate school to the principalship. However, office workers are an essential ingredient in any successful school. They support...
student learning through their effective work, friendly manner, and concern for people. They are necessary to a positive school climate because they interact with students, staff members, and the community. Schools have long relied on the inherent stability of these loyal workers for effective management of the school office. And principals must learn how to support and manage their office staff members.

**Seeing the Need**

Tartan High School in Oakdale, Minn., is a 1,600 pupil, grades 9 through 12 high school. Our office staff is dependable, efficient, and experienced. They effectively support our classroom operation through their work on attendance, grades, schedule, mailings, and the like. But major changes in the school, such as transferring data...
processing duties from the district office to the school, budget cuts, remodeling the office facility, and the ever-present need to improve mandated a review of the office work flow.

Over the years, our school district has used consultants for various projects, and it seemed appropriate to ask that a consultant review our office operations. An outsider, we felt, would have a neutral point of view. All involved parties, from the superintendent to the building administration to the office workers and their union, agreed to our suggestion.

We interviewed a capable consultant and reviewed the compatibility of the consultant’s experience and the school’s situation. We developed a proposal that defined the study’s process and cost. References were checked, a contract was established, and a review was agreed upon. The principals’ office, the guidance office, the media center, and technology services were reviewed in this project. The process was designed to be completed in two months.

Finding Solutions
During the study, the consultant interviewed different staff members, from the supervisors to the office support personnel, and the secretaries completed a self-assessment tool. The variety of resources helped broaden the perspective of the study. Any recommended change in operation was reviewed by the school before it was implemented. Because we introduced the study in a positive, productive manner, the people involved were very cooperative.
Office workers are an essential ingredient in any successful school. They support student learning through their effective work, friendly manner, and concern for people. They are necessary to a positive school climate.

Organizational Chart. Tartan’s office chart is a organization common high school model. Responsibility and authority are delegated in a traditional fashion.

Current Responsibility Matrix. The secretary first completed a position description questionnaire, then interviewed with the consultant. The information the secretary provided was incorporated into a matrix that could be used to:
• Provide the consultant with a review of the group’s responsibilities and check for disparities
• Provide a check for redundancies as well as perceived workload issues
• Provide information about each position’s perceived priorities
• Provide the supervisor with current information about job assignments and cross-training needs.

Desired Responsibility Matrix. In this section, the employee interview and position description information are combined with an overall department review. Each position is outlined and provided with specific recommendations. We were aware that if we implemented the recommendations in this section, individuals and office operations would be affected. The consultant emphasized that the office operations were efficient, although there were areas that could use improvement.

Some recommendations included:
• Assign tasks to a single person where possible (i.e., budgeting activity)
• Distribute bulletins and staff information by means of e-mail or voice mail
• Help secretaries prioritize work load
• Clarify newly assigned responsibilities as time and experience dictate
• Plan cross-training activities
• Add equipment
• Move staff work stations to improve communication
• Review current school policies
• Ask the disciplinarians to create bulletin boards that outline their daily schedules so the secretaries can schedule meetings with students
• Regularly schedule office staff and faculty meetings
• Formally plan inservices for new and veteran employees.

Technical Support Assessment. Tartan High School relies on technology for efficient daily operation. This is an exceptionally demanding area because of the constant changes in equipment and software, new grading and curriculum initiatives, and financial and personnel constraints. The results of the survey suggested that the school make several changes, including purchasing additional technology and demanding that staff members perform at a minimal level of technical proficiency that would allow the building technology personnel to spend less time troubleshooting simple problems. The building’s technology committee was praised for the leadership and planning it provides the school.

Administrative Roles Commentary. Following the interviews with the secretaries, the consultant interviewed the supervisors. Supervisors are essential to overseeing and developing procedures and receiving the secretaries’ work. The consultant’s comments were based on personal contacts as well as observation of daily office activity. Recommendations included:
• Inform the support staff of the administrators’ daily schedules
• Help staff members prioritize their work
• Schedule bimonthly formal office staff meetings
• Create opportunities for informal coaching sessions
• Review troublesome school policies
• Review technology implementation
• Be open to ideas to improve office operation

Activity Summary/Cyclical Issues. Obviously, the school year has periods during which the office personnel’s workload varies. A formal calendar could graphically represent these periods. Annual and monthly calendars could be distributed to be planning guides for the community, the teachers, the office staff, and the administrators. The calendar could track assemblies, grading deadlines, school activities, deadlines for technical installations, budget deadlines, and the like.

Office Assessment Conclusion. The study was completed on time, and our staff members reviewed the consultant’s report. Now we must begin the challenging work of digesting the information and the recommendations. We will continue focusing on the key areas of open and regular communication, process improvement and evaluation, technology implementation, performance and behavior coaching, active listening, customer service, and supporting appropriate risk taking.

Clete Lipetzky (clipetzk@isd622.k12.mn.us) is principal of Tartan High School in Oakdale, Minn., and a member of the NASSP Board of Directors.