



John Rex Charter School

2022 Strategic Assessment Analysis

Prepared and presented by Schnake Turnbo Frank

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Schnake Turnbo Frank

20 East Fifth Street, Suite 1500
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74103

914 North Broadway, Suite 120
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73102

www.schnake.com

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Executive Summary

John Rex Charter Schools is a unique charter school located in the heart of downtown Oklahoma City, offering quality education to an economically and racially diverse student population.

Launched in 2014 through the combined efforts and vision of community leaders, funders, the Oklahoma City Public School district (OKCPS), and invested families, John Rex Schools was designed to serve as a multifaceted solution to the surrounding community, with an emphasis on academic rigor and personalized project-based learning in the classrooms taught by high-quality teachers, and the opportunity to build positive, mutually beneficial relationships among the downtown community and utilize the ample resources available through these relationships to enhance the student experience beyond that of other traditional elementary schools. Originally envisioned as a means to invigorate the Oklahoma City downtown community by attracting families to a premier school, John Rex School and its student-centric culture have become a beacon of academic excellence in the immediate and adjacent neighborhoods, providing an alternative to the nearby traditional public schools. In the years since John Rex School first opened its doors, the enrollment numbers, growth momentum, and reputation of the charter skyrocketed, leading to an expansion of the school's educational model into middle school in Fall 2018.

The John Rex Board of Directors has been tasked with maintaining and ever-expanding the vision and mission of the school. With several recent external and internal changes that have impacted the John Rex community, the board felt it necessary to re-examine the school's foundational philosophies, culture, and goals along with the current trajectory and policies in place to gauge the unique challenges and opportunities John Rex School faces presently.

To accomplish this, the John Rex School Board, working alongside Schnake Turnbo Frank (STF), launched an in-depth study in April 2022 and concluded in June 2022. Through research conducted by STF, the John Rex School Board collected just over 430 surveys from John Rex families, faculty, staff, and board members conducted 15 focus groups with current parents and faculty, and held 11 individual interviews with key community partners and school administration, all in an effort to better understand existing perceptions and opinions surrounding John Rex Charter Schools. Following this research, 26 members of the school's community (collection of board members, administration, faculty representatives, and PTA leadership) have been asked to participate in two half-day strategic planning sessions. The strategic plan developed through these sessions will serve as the roadmap for John Rex Schools for the next two to five years, focusing on the school's growing reputation across Oklahoma City. This report highlights themes around four areas of focus:

- **Culture**
- **Curriculum**
- **Communication**
- **Leadership**

Assessment Approach

STF began its research by outlining questions that expanded on the most important touchpoints as determined by the John Rex Board. Once questions were reviewed by the John Rex Strategic Planning Subcommittee, STF created a **logic-driven survey** and solicited responses from school stakeholders such as:

- John Rex faculty/staff and administration
- John Rex parents and guardians
- John Rex board members

Focus groups were held in addition to further engage John Rex parents, teaching staff, and the John Rex Board of Directors, and **individual interviews** for John Rex administration were conducted as well.

STF performed the audit using various methods of interview-style questioning to analyze John Rex Schools through the lenses of all stakeholders. The conversations were not limited to the questions asked, which gave John Rex families, faculty, community partners, and leadership the opportunity to freely discuss their day-to-day experiences.

Qualitative research uses a small number of participants to allow for more in-depth discussion. Unlike with quantitative studies, which can be used to analyze clusters and gather overall trends, qualitative research allows us to drill down into more profound insights and perspectives that make up the general trend and gain subjective attitudes and experiences. John Rex School's audit included both qualitative and quantitative research in order to build an accurate assessment of trends.

Additionally, our team evaluated, reviewed, and engaged perspectives from critical school funders and community partners through **individual interviews**. John Rex community partners engaged included:

- Inasmuch Foundation
- OKC Metropolitan Downtown Library
- YMCA of Greater Oklahoma City
- John Rex Parent Teacher Association

Survey Overview

To address priorities and better understand the overall sentiment of the John Rex community at large over the current culture, education model, teaching, and administrative staff, among other topics, STF launched three separate surveys to school stakeholders:

- A 92-question survey was sent to John Rex families, and STF received 362 completed responses.
- A 60-question survey was sent to John Rex faculty and staff, and STF received 59 completed responses.
- A 52-question survey was sent to John Rex board members, and STF received four completed responses.

The surveys, available online from April 21, 2022, to May 31, 2022, were strategically designed to amplify the voices of the John Rex community.

Mining the results, we were able to dissect the identified areas of praise, concern, and misinformation within each sub-group of stakeholders. Qualitative data of this sort helps describe the problem and brainstorm solutions. The survey was a critical starting point for the John Rex School audit.

Focus Group Overview

The questions and overall discussion focused on the John Rex parent, board member, and teaching staff's day-to-day experience.

To review the complete question guide, turn to Appendix A.

The focus groups were separated by stakeholder type. The parent groups ranged in attendee number, with the smallest group containing three individuals and the largest capped at 15. All teacher groups had nine to 10 participants.

Stakeholder Interviews

One-on-one interviews with stakeholders played an essential role in this research and led to further examination of the John Rex ecosystem both within the classroom and among the broader downtown community, particularly the dynamics between the John Rex Head of School, John Rex administration, and John Rex community partners.

Through stakeholder interviews, we received input on the strengths and challenges that John Rex Schools face in fulfilling its goals.

To review the complete question guide, turn to Appendix A.

Those interviewed from the community included:

1. Bob Ross, Chief Executive Officer – Inasmuch Foundation
2. Tyler Tokarczyk, Senior Program Officer – Inasmuch Foundation
3. Lois Medina, Youth and Family Director – YMCA of Greater Oklahoma
4. Abigail Stout, Engagement Manager - Metropolitan Library System of Oklahoma County

Key Findings

1. The John Rex community that has been a part of the school since before the recent internal and external transitions that have impacted the school have identified a **shift in the cultural focus** of the school; even so, this new culture and direction of the school has not been clearly communicated to stakeholders.
2. The John Rex community desires **more engagement and visibility** from the current John Rex School Board and John Rex leadership.
3. The John Rex community also seeks **improved lines of communication** from John Rex administration, including John Rex leadership and the John Rex Board of Directors, on school board meetings, school policies, and direction, vision, and mission of John Rex.
4. John Rex faculty believes continued **regular training opportunities and additional administrative support** for teachers would be beneficial in maintaining a consistent classroom experience.
5. Stakeholders expressed a desire to see **more classroom use of downtown resources** and more engagement with community partners from school leadership.

Parent Feedback:

- **Culture**
 - John Rex Strengths:
 - Parents used the words “welcoming,” “diverse,” “inclusive,” and “supportive” when asked to describe the culture of the school.
 - Families showed eagerness to re-engage with the school.
 - John Rex Improvement Opportunities:
 - Much of the earlier practices of the school are remembered by families with older students who have been attending John Rex prior to 2020, while newer families are unaware of these “missing cultural elements.”
 - *Cultural elements identified by families are:*
 - *downtown community engagement*
 - *opportunities to connect with school leadership*
 - *appropriate support of the teaching staff*
 - *Adherence to the vision and mission of the school.*
 - Families who have been a part of the John Rex community before 2020 show a deep understanding and appreciation of the mission, vision, and culture of the school but share a concern that recent transitions of John Rex leadership have not allowed for the values and priorities originally intended for the school to be upheld to the same degree.
 - Newer families do not share this same concern.
 - *Families either are not aware of the current mission, vision, and direction of the school or have not seen it prioritized by school administration.*

- **Leadership**

- John Rex Strengths:

- Families agree that school leadership is approachable and responsive
 - Families share having positive interactions with school directors

- John Rex Improvement Opportunities:

- Comments expressed include:
 - More opportunities to engage with John Rex leadership
 - Consistent messaging from John Rex leadership about the direction, mission, and vision of the school
 - Desire to see increased involvement from John Rex Board of Directors
 - Easier access to communication from John Rex Board of Directors
 - Request for a change of board meeting times to make them more accessible for working parents

Faculty & Staff Feedback:

- **Culture**

- John Rex Strengths:

- Faculty responses to both the survey and in focus group sessions share insight on a supportive and generally positive teacher culture at the school.

- John Rex Improvement Opportunities:

- Faculty shares concern over the mission, vision, and direction of John Rex present day; many do not believe the school is currently heading in the right direction.
 - Additional concerns include:
 - Need for clearly communicated strategic goals
 - Desire for increased engagement with the downtown community
 - Need for more support from John Rex leadership
 - Clearly communicated and consistent discipline policy and appropriate intervention from John Rex leadership on behavioral classroom disruptions
 - Need for counseling staff for students

- **Curriculum**

- John Rex Strengths:

- Teachers are encouraged to be innovative and have autonomy in their classrooms and instructional plans.
 - Downtown resources
 - Individualized learning and adaptable student support

- Faculty respondents share a desire for additional training and instructional coaching.
 - John Rex Improvement Opportunities:
 - Regular training and instructional coaching for teachers
 - Faculty desires established and consistently communicated discipline policy.
 - More administrative support for teachers
 - Faculty expressed genuine concern over the consistent disciplinary disruptions in the classroom, which impact instruction.
 - When asked for possible solutions, faculty mentioned the need for counseling/social-emotional learning and special education support, staff.
- **Communication**
 - John Rex Improvement Opportunities:
 - Faculty would like to receive regular updates on the strategic direction of the school from school administration.
 - Faculty desires better lines of communication with school leadership.
- **Leadership**
 - John Rex Improvement Opportunities:
 - More support, visibility, and engagement from school leadership and board.

Community Partner Feedback:

- John Rex Strengths:
 - Classroom use of current downtown resources such as the downtown library and Myriad Gardens.
 - Great communication from John Rex teachers.
- John Rex Improvement Opportunities:
 - Desire to see school leadership improve and expand relationships with downtown businesses and organizations.
 - Similarly, they would like to see John Rex administration further engage with the donor community.
 - Desire to see a more civic-focused board of directors.
 - Increased communications to partners and the larger community that allow stakeholders to remain engaged and updated on John Rex accomplishments and goals.

Appendix A – Focus Group & Interview Questions

Focus Group & Administration Interview Questions

1. *Talk to me about the culture at John Rex*
2. *Do you understand the mission and vision of John Rex?*
 - a. *How do you believe the school is living up to its mission and vision?*
3. *What are the goals at John Rex as you understand them?*
4. *Does John Rex feel like a supportive, enriching, diverse community?*
5. *What characteristics do you think John Rex parents value the most for their students/do you as a parent value most for your student?*
6. *Is the school's leadership approachable and responsive?*
7. *Is the school's leadership effective?*
8. *Do you receive regular communications about things you need to know?*
9. *What is going well at John Rex?*
10. *What could be better?*
11. *Would you recommend John Rex to other families/teachers?*
12. *In what ways has John Rex met or exceeded your expectations?*
13. *In what ways has John Rex failed to meet your expectations?*
14. *Is there any other feedback you would like to share?*

Community Partner Questions:

1. *Help us understand what your organization's relationship with John Rex Charter Schools has typically looked like in the past?*
 1. *Have things changed in recent years? If so, what does the relationship look like now?*
2. *Talk to us about the culture at John Rex as it appears from the outside perspective*
3. *Do you, as a community partner and John Rex stakeholder, understand the school's mission and vision?*
 - a. *How do you feel the school has lived up to the mission and vision?*
4. *What unique challenges do you feel John Rex faces in this community as a stakeholder?*
5. *Does John Rex appear to be a supportive, enriching diverse community from an external perspective?*
6. *Do you, as a community partner, receive regular communications regarding partnering opportunities from John Rex?*
7. *Where do you see additional opportunities for engagement and partnership with John Rex in the future?*
8. *From an external perspective, what are your thoughts on John Rex administration?*
9. *Is there any other feedback you would like to share?*