

PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Stroudsburg Area School District Monroe County, Pennsylvania

January 2015



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General
Eugene A. DePasquale • Auditor General



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0018
Facebook: Pennsylvania Auditor General
Twitter: @PAAuditorGen

EUGENE A. DePASQUALE
AUDITOR GENERAL

The Honorable Tom Corbett
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

Mr. Richard Pierce, Board President
Stroudsburg Area School District
123 Linden Street
Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania 18360

Dear Governor Corbett and Mr. Pierce:

We conducted a performance audit of the Stroudsburg Area School District (District) to determine its compliance with certain relevant state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures (relevant requirements). Our audit covered the period May 25, 2012 through October 24, 2014, except as otherwise indicated in the report. Additionally, compliance specific to state subsidies and reimbursements was determined for the school years ended June 30, 2011 and June 30, 2012. Our audit was conducted pursuant to Section 403 of The Fiscal Code, 72 P.S. § 403, and in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States.

Our audit found that the District complied, in all significant respects, with relevant requirements.

We appreciate the District's cooperation during the conduct of the audit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eugene A. DePasquale".

Eugene A. DePasquale
Auditor General

January 15, 2015

cc: **STROUDSBURG AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT** Board of School Directors

Table of Contents

| | Page |
|---|------|
| Executive Summary | 1 |
| Audit Scope, Objectives, and Methodology | 2 |
| Findings and Observations | 5 |
| Status of Prior Audit Findings and Observations | 6 |
| Distribution List | 8 |

Executive Summary

Audit Work

The Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General conducted a performance audit of the Stroudsburg Area School District (District) in Monroe County. Our audit sought to answer certain questions regarding the District's compliance with certain relevant state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures and to determine the status of corrective action taken by the District in response to our prior audit recommendations.

Our audit scope covered the period May 25, 2012 through October 24, 2014, except as otherwise indicated in the audit scope, objectives, and methodology section of the report. Compliance specific to state subsidies and reimbursements was determined for the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years.

District Background

The District encompasses approximately 73 square miles. According to 2010 federal census data, it serves a resident population of 34,609. According to District officials, the District provided basic educational services to 5,400 pupils through the employment of 468 teachers, 354 full-time and part-time support personnel, and nineteen (19) administrators during the 2011-12 school year. The District received \$23.4 million in state funding in the 2011-12 school year.

Audit Conclusion and Results

Our audit found that the District complied, in all significant respects, with certain relevant state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures. Our audit resulted in no findings or observations.

Status of Prior Audit Findings and

Observations. With regard to the status of our prior audit recommendations to the Stroudsburg Area School District (District) from an audit released on March 13, 2013, we found that the District had taken appropriate corrective action pertaining to errors in reporting non-resident membership (see page 6). We found that we could not determine if corrective action was taken regarding employment agreements with a questionable sabbatical option (see page 7). With regard to the status of an issue needing further study addressed in our prior audit, we found that the District had taken appropriate steps to address a potential budget shortfall (see page 7).

Audit Scope, Objectives, and Methodology

Scope

What is a school performance audit?

School performance audits allow the Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General to determine whether state funds, including school subsidies, are being used according to the purposes and guidelines that govern the use of those funds. Additionally, our audits examine the appropriateness of certain administrative and operational practices at each local education agency (LEA). The results of these audits are shared with LEA management, the Governor, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and other concerned entities.

Our audit, conducted under authority of Section 403 of The Fiscal Code, 72 P.S. § 403, is not a substitute for the local annual audit required by the Public School Code of 1949, as amended. We conducted our audit in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States.

Our audit covered the period May 25, 2012 through October 24, 2014, except for the verification of professional employee certification, which was performed for the period July 1, 2014 through September 26, 2014.

Regarding state subsidies and reimbursements, our audit covered the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years.

While all districts have the same school years, some have different fiscal years. Therefore, for the purposes of our audit work and to be consistent with Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) reporting guidelines, we use the term *school year* rather than fiscal year throughout this report. A school year covers the period July 1 to June 30.

Objectives

What is the difference between a finding and an observation?

Our performance audits may contain findings and/or observations related to our audit objectives. Findings describe noncompliance with a statute, regulation, policy, contract, grant requirement, or administrative procedure. Observations are reported when we believe corrective action should be taken to remedy a potential problem not rising to the level of noncompliance with specific criteria.

Performance audits draw conclusions based on an evaluation of sufficient, appropriate evidence. Evidence is measured against criteria, such as laws and defined business practices. Our audit focused on assessing the District's compliance with certain relevant state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures. However, as we conducted our audit procedures, we sought to determine answers to the following questions, which serve as our audit objectives:

- ✓ Were professional employees certified for the positions they held?
- ✓ In areas where the District received state subsidies and reimbursements based on pupil membership (e.g., basic education, special education, and vocational education), did it follow applicable laws and procedures?

- ✓ In areas where the District received transportation subsidies, was the District, and any contracted vendors, in compliance with applicable state laws and procedures?
- ✓ Did the District, and any contracted vendors, ensure that current bus drivers were properly qualified, and did they have written policies and procedures governing the hiring of new bus drivers?
- ✓ Did the District pursue a contract buy-out with an administrator and if so, what was the total cost of the buy-out, what were the reasons for the termination/settlement, and did the current employment contract(s) contain adequate termination provisions?
- ✓ Were votes made by the District's Board of School Directors free from apparent conflicts of interest?
- ✓ Did the District have sufficient internal controls to ensure that the membership data it reported to PDE through the Pennsylvania Information Management System was complete, accurate, valid, and reliable?
- ✓ Were there any declining fund balances that may pose a risk to the District's fiscal viability?
- ✓ Did the District take appropriate steps to ensure school safety?
- ✓ Did the District have a properly executed and updated Memorandum of Understanding with local law enforcement?
- ✓ Were there any other areas of concern reported by independent auditors, citizens, or other interested parties?
- ✓ Did the District take appropriate corrective action to address recommendations made in our prior audit?

Methodology

What are internal controls?

Internal controls are processes designed by management to provide reasonable assurance of achieving objectives in areas such as:

- Effectiveness and efficiency of operations.
- Relevance and reliability of operational and financial information.
- Compliance with certain relevant state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures.

Government Auditing Standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our results and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our results and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

The District's management is responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance that the District is in compliance with certain relevant state laws, regulations, contracts, grant requirements, and administrative procedures (relevant requirements). In conducting our audit, we obtained an understanding of the District's internal controls, including any information technology controls, as they relate to the District's compliance with relevant requirements that we consider to be significant within the context of our audit objectives. We assessed whether those controls were properly designed and implemented. Any deficiencies in internal controls that were identified during the conduct of our audit and determined to be significant within the context of our audit objectives are included in this report.

In order to properly plan our audit and to guide us in possible audit areas, we performed analytical procedures in the areas of state subsidies and reimbursements, pupil transportation, and comparative financial information.

Our audit examined the following:

- Records pertaining to pupil transportation, pupil membership, bus driver qualifications, professional employee certification, and financial stability.
- Items such as board meeting minutes and policies and procedures.

Additionally, we interviewed select administrators and support personnel associated with the District's operations.

To determine the status of our audit recommendations made in a prior audit report released on March 13, 2013, we performed additional audit procedures targeting the previously reported matters.

Findings and Observations

For the audited period, our audit of the Stroudsburg Area School District resulted in no findings or observations.

Status of Prior Audit Findings and Observations

Our prior audit of the Stroudsburg Area School District (District) released on March 13, 2013, resulted in one (1) finding, one (1) observation, and one (1) issue needing further study. As part of our current audit, we determined the status of corrective action taken by the District to implement our prior audit recommendations. We performed audit procedures and interviewed District personnel regarding the prior finding, observation, and issue needing further study. As shown below, we found that the District did implement our recommendations related to errors in reporting non-resident membership. We found that we could not determine if corrective action was taken regarding employment agreements with a questionable sabbatical option. With regard to the status of the issue needing further study, we found that the District had taken appropriate steps to address a potential budget shortfall.

Auditor General Performance Audit Report Released on March 13, 2013

Finding: **Errors in Reporting of Non-Resident Membership Resulting in an Underpayment of \$135,772**

Finding Summary: Our prior audit of the District's pupil membership reports to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) for the 2009-10 school year found reporting errors for non-resident students. District personnel failed to report membership for non-resident students. These errors resulted in a reimbursement underpayment of \$135,772 for the 2009-10 school year.

Recommendations: Our audit finding recommended that the District should:

1. Strengthen controls to ensure pupil membership is reported in accordance with PDE guidelines and instructions.
2. Implement controls to verify actual membership days to computer generated reports.
3. Perform an internal review of membership reports and summaries prior to submission of final reports to PDE.
4. Review subsequent year reports and if errors are found submit revised reports to PDE.

We also recommended that PDE should:

5. Adjust the District's allocations to resolve the underpayment in the amount of \$135,772 for the 2009-10 school year.

Current Status: During our current audit, we found that the District did implement our prior recommendations. As of October 24, 2014, the District had not yet received the \$135,772 underpayment from PDE.

Observation: Employment Agreements with a Questionable Sabbatical Option

Observation Summary: Our prior audit found that the employee agreements the District entered into with all of its administrators included an option that allowed an administrator who is eligible for sabbatical leave, but does not exercise that option, to exchange a sabbatical leave for a monetary escrow, to be used for the purchase of health insurance upon retirement from the District. We observed that there is no provision in the Public School Code for such an option.

Recommendations: Our audit observation recommended that the District should:

1. When negotiating employee agreements, consider the taxpayers' expectation that their money will be used for the education of the District's children.
2. Create all of the District's employment agreements as transparent as possible, so that the District's taxpayers can evaluate their appropriateness.

Current Status: During our current audit, we could not determine if our recommendations were implemented because the prior contract between the District's administration and Board of School Directors (Board) had been extended for another year. Therefore, no new employee agreement has been negotiated.

Issue Needing Further Study

The prior audit found that the District was facing a \$10 million shortfall in its 2012-13 budget. At the conclusion of the fieldwork for our prior audit, the District's administration presented the Board with a list of 36 potential cost saving measures to help close that projected budget gap. These cost saving measures totaled \$13,858,656.

Current Status Our current audit found that the District's Board did enact several of the cost saving measures proposed by the administration and did make related personnel decisions prior to adopting the District's 2012-13 budget. Our analytical comparison of financial data revealed that the District does not have a general fund deficit, nor an operating deficit.

Distribution List

This report was initially distributed to the Superintendent of the District, the Board of School Directors, our website at www.auditorgen.state.pa.us, and the following stakeholders:

The Honorable Tom Corbett
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Carolyn Dumaesq
Acting Secretary of Education
1010 Harristown Building #2
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126

The Honorable Robert M. McCord
State Treasurer
Room 129 - Finance Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Ms. Lori Graham
Acting Director
Bureau of Budget and Fiscal Management
Pennsylvania Department of Education
4th Floor, 333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126

Dr. David Wazeter
Research Manager
Pennsylvania State Education Association
400 North Third Street - Box 1724
Harrisburg, PA 17105

Mr. Lin Carpenter
Assistant Executive Director for Member Services
School Board and Management Services
Pennsylvania School Boards Association
P.O. Box 2042
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055

This report is a matter of public record and is available online at www.auditorgen.state.pa.us. Media questions about the report can be directed to the Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General, Office of Communications, 231 Finance Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120; via email to: news@auditorgen.state.pa.us.